

In the Dark

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“I killed six people.”

“Yeah?” Anni strolled down the slope toward the lake, peering through the pre-dawn gloom. She could barely make out where Josh McLaren was standing, down among the chunks of ice and rocks jumbled along the shore. “When did this happen?”

“Last night.”

As she got closer, she saw that he was standing on a slab of concrete that tilted into Lake Michigan. A weathered tree limb jammed among the rocks by a storm jutted up beside him, pointing at the sky, white as bone. The sun hadn’t risen yet, but the sky was growing light. The water was choppy and restless. To the north, the skyscrapers of the Loop were swathed in low clouds.

“That’s why all those police are up there,” he said. “They’re here to arrest me.”

"No, they just thought you were acting kind of weird. I talked to them. They're leaving."

The CPD squad car that had drawn up on the park drive had already pulled away. Only a unit from the University of Chicago police remained. Anni hooked her thumbs into her jeans pockets casually, keeping her hands where Josh could see them. It wouldn't take much for him to start imagining things, and his trust could turn to overwhelming fear in an instant.

"That island out there," Josh said, staring a faint shape out across the water. Do you know what it is?"

She followed his gaze. "Don't think it's an island. Looks like a structure of some kind."

"I've asked about it, but nobody will tell me what it is."

She climbed down the concrete steps toward the water cautiously. They were glazed with ice. "Maybe it's some kind of navigation marker."

"Or it's a prison." He studied her face, as if looking for signs of betrayal.

"I'd know if it was a prison."

"A secret prison. They erased it from public satellite images. I've checked." A plume broke against the rocks, soaking his already wet jeans. He didn't seem to register the shock of icy water, though he was shivering. "They don't want us to know."

"Josh, I'm getting cold out here. Can we go up to my car and talk?"

"I don't want to be arrested again."

"You won't be. I told the police I know you. They went away."

"They lied to you, then. I mean, they have to arrest me. I killed six people."

"No, you didn't."

"I did, too," he insisted, but his certainty was wavering. "When I left my apartment, I killed everyone I met. That's why they're after me."

"If we go to my car—"

"I've killed lots of people. I might kill you."

"You wouldn't do that."

"How do you know?" Another wave rolled in, a big one. This time the spray rose so high it splashed his back and he gasped, then grinned, some kind of dare in his eyes. She stepped out onto a rock that put her at his level and only two steps away from him.

"People swim here," he said, daring her, though his teeth were chattering and his lips were blue.

"Not in March, they don't."

"They drop down into the water right off these rocks and start swimming." He nodded down the curving shoreline, to a wooden bathhouse that was boarded up for the winter, dirty snow drifted against it. "I've seen them head for that beach. Sometimes I lose sight of them because of the waves. And every time I think 'they're not going to make it.' But they do. They swim the whole way. Like they're practicing." His eyes darted toward the shape far out on the horizon, then back, as if sending Anni an urgent coded message.

“Come on, Josh.” She held out a hand, offering to help him off his slab of concrete, but he wrapped his arms around his chest.

“Practicing in case they get caught and sent out there, to that prison, but it’s too far. It’s never going to work.”

“Let’s go get warm in my car.”

He wiped his nose with his fist, then hugged his chest again. “I’m scared, Anni.”

“I know.”

“I’ve been scared all my life.” He closed his eyes and rocked on the balls of his feet. Anni measured the distance, weighed her options. He was nearly a foot taller than her, and his clothes would add to his weight. If he went in, it wouldn’t be easy to pull him out and hypothermia would set in fast. She stepped onto Josh’s concrete slab to put herself between him and the water, but her feet began to slide on an invisible slick of black ice. She teetered, trying to get her footing, having to drop to her hands and knees to avoid slipping backward into the lake.

“Dammit!” Her jeans had snagged on a sharp nub of rebar and had ripped open. So had her knee, she realized as the shredded denim seeped blood. A wave of icy water burst against the rocks, taking her breath away with the shock of it. “That’s it. We’re going, Josh,” she said between chattering teeth.

He nodded, suddenly resigned, and held out a hand to help her up.

She guided Josh toward her car, doing her best to keep him

talking and focused on her, so he wouldn't notice the U of C squad car. After nudging him into the passenger side she gave the officer a thumbs up, so he could let his dispatcher know that the grad student whose parents were major donors to the university was out of danger.

She turned her old Corolla's heat to its highest setting and they headed to the hospital where Josh had been admitted several times before. After he was led away by a cheery nurse, she called his parents and waited for them to arrive.

George and Donna McLaren had hired Anni four years earlier, when Josh had walked out of his dorm room and vanished. He had told his professors he had solved a classic math problem. Though he was having trouble explaining his solution, his intuitive grasp of difficult concepts was advanced enough that it took a couple of days before they realized his ideas were delusional. By that time, the voices that had revealed the solution had started to say terrible things to him, terrifying things, and he went on the run, convinced he had to go to the southernmost tip of Argentina for reasons he couldn't explain. When Anni finally caught up with him he had been nabbed while trying to climb onto a freight train in a South Side rail yard. He was hungry and dirty and scared out of his wits.

Since she had started taking on cases like this, it seemed everyone she knew had a family member or friend with a mental illness, an uncontrolled addiction or both. Her clients were only unusual in that they had enough money to hire a licensed private investigator to locate their kids when their

lives derailed. After briefing them, she listened to his mother's gushing gratitude long enough to be polite, but about twenty minutes longer than she wanted, before finally heading home.

Back at her West Side flat, she took a hot shower, put a fresh bandage over the scratch on her knee, filled the kettle, and listened to accumulated phone messages. The first was from a reporter she'd known for years. Az Abkerian's voice had the kludgy, thickened sound it got after he'd had too much to drink. After rambling about how sorry he was to be calling in the middle of the night, he abruptly broke off, swore and hung up. Strange. He never seemed to care what time it was when he was on a story, nor was he always sober, but he'd never apologized for calling before. The second was from Dugan, saying he hoped the kid had turned up. She played it again, just to hear his voice, then sent him a quick text that he could read when he had a free moment. The third message was a cheery, confident voice that sounded vaguely familiar.

"Anni? It's Ben. Been ages since we've seen each other." Ben who? she thought. She had a few Bens in her mental address book. Apparently this one thought he was so important she would instantly know who he was. "Listen, I just ran into Nancy and it gave me an awesome idea. I've been working on this project and I'm hitting a brick wall because tracing missing people wasn't exactly part of my grad school training. Here's the deal: I'm doing research on an artist who

died last January. Nobody knows anything about his background, and we need to know his life story. Seeing Nancy reminded me this kind of research is in your skillset, and I have grant funding that could cover your fees. Anyway, give me a call when you get a chance.”

Ben Sidlo, she realized. He taught art history at Stony Cliff College, where her brother worked. He had once curated an art exhibit for a friend, a street artist Sidlo claimed to have “discovered,” though the police knew about him first, back when Lucas was just another homeless kid with an X-Acto knife, cans of spray paint, artistic talent and a juvenile record. She jotted “call Sidlo” on a sticky note and stuck it on her laptop as a reminder.

It would be good to have a simple, routine job to do. The bill for a new furnace had swallowed her savings whole and was hungry for more, but she could only take on so many cases like Josh’s, even though they could be lucrative. During the ten years she had worked as a cop, she’d dealt with parents who’d lost a child to stray gunfire or women who’d been brutalized by their partners. She’d comforted children while they waited for social services to come and take them away from a home where there was broken glass on the floor and blood on the walls. But back then there was plenty of paperwork and court prep to muffle the impact, and other officers to joke around with, make it all seem normal, part of a day’s work. Now that she was working solo, all she could do was balance her wealthy but desperate clients with routine inves-

tigations for a public interest law office. And get things off her chest with Dugan.

Though that wasn't always an option. They had settled into unmarried bliss, keeping toothbrushes at each other's places, but their unpredictable schedules meant they were often out of sync, and they couldn't blow off steam about cases. Anni was not only a civilian, she often did investigative work for a criminal defense attorney. That made for gaps in their conversation as they ran into professional boundaries. That was happening a lot, lately. Dugan was working on something particularly sensitive that was frustrating him. All he could tell her was that he was having to spend most of his time in meetings at headquarters. He couldn't wait to get back to real work, investigating murders and assaults instead of . . . whatever it was.

As Anni waited for the kettle to boil, she wondered how Josh was doing. He had been in that hospital often enough to know the routine, but he would still be in the grip of delusions, thinking that everyone around him was staring at him, accusing him of unspeakable horrors, even though in reality the other patients were too occupied by their own problems to even notice there was a new guy on the ward. His disease was always scary, but the worst of it was at times like this, when his hallucinations were in charge, telling him he had committed terrible crimes, that he deserved to die.

A buzzing hum insinuated itself into a spot just behind her ears, an insistent whine of anxiety that rose into a shriek of

alarm. She came out of her doze just long enough to switch off the kettle and stumble into bed.

When she returned Ben Sidlo's call after a few hours of sleep he sounded delighted to hear from her. She couldn't tell how genuine it was; he always had his charm turned up full blast. It made him a popular teacher, but there was something phoney about his enthusiasm. He proposed they meet at a coffee shop in Wicker Park after he wrapped up office hours.

She got there before him and claimed a table with a view of the front door, then ordered coffee and a bowl of soup, still feeling the chill of the icy lake water deep in her bones. She was on a second mug of coffee when he breezed in, wearing his usual skinny jeans and Elvis Costello glasses. He gave her a beaming smile and wave and headed to the counter to place his order and chat up the barista before he came to her table. For a moment she thought he was going to lean in for an air-kiss, but something in her face must have made him change his mind. Instead he rumbled his hair and took a chair across

from hers, beaming her a smile. “Good to see you. You’re looking great. How’ve you been?”

“Fine. You?”

“Busy. I got a new arts management minor pushed through and it’s incredibly popular, so I have advisees coming out of my ears. I’m on three major committees and I’m giving a paper next week that I haven’t even started writing. It’s insane. Why do we do this to ourselves?”

Anni gave him a noncommittal smile. Academics treated being busy as a competitive sport, and Sidlo was nothing if not competitive.

“How’s Lucas, by the way?” he asked. “Haven’t seen him in ages.”

“He’s great. A bike shop up in Evanston just hired him to do a burner on their wall once the weather warms up.” In the past, Lucas risked arrest for covering a wall with spray paint, but since his job title changed from vandal to artist he got paid for it. A lot.

“People still talk about that show we did. Listen, I really appreciate your being willing to get together so late in the day.”

“I just got out of bed, actually.” He raised an eyebrow. “Up all night on a job. Didn’t get to sleep until noon.”

“Ooh, tell me more.”

“I would, but then I’d have to kill you.” He made a pouty face, so she added, “Confidentiality is part of the deal when I take on a job.”

“Ah, of course. Well, this job will be different than anything you’ve done before.”

“From your voicemail it sounds a lot like what I used to do for the city.” He gave his eyebrows another workout, making her wonder if he practiced in the mirror. “You need background on a dead guy. In a homicide investigation, that’s basically what you do. Get the background so you can figure out what happened.”

“See? You’ll be perfect for this. Actually, I was thinking of it more as a missing persons case. You handle those, right?”

“Sure. Among other things.”

“You look for runaway kids, I found Instagram stories about that from parents who you’d helped. There was also some big case when you worked for the police, a little boy who disappeared? Major headline news.” He paused. She sipped her coffee. “Besides, isn’t this how you got started? You went looking for your missing mom, right?”

Anni put her mug down. “Where’d you hear that?”

“Nancy mentioned it once. That you were, like, ten years old and in foster care, but decided you were going to find your mother and that’s what led you became a police officer. I don’t know the details.”

And I’m not about to give them to you, Anni thought. It wasn’t a story for gossipy twerps in this bougie café, the long-ago search that ended in a bleak corner of a cemetery where unclaimed bodies were interred by the county. “So, what you know about this artist?”

“His name was Feliks Król. Feliks spelled with a K instead

of an X. He lived for as long as anyone can remember in what had been a dreary boarding house not far from here. You wouldn't know it now, but Wicker Park was pretty down-at-heels, with a big influx of Polish émigrés after the war, then Latinos in the sixties, lots of gang activity. Some of the big houses built in the nineteenth century got subdivided into cheap lodgings. The current owner is rehabbing the building, but he let Feliks stay on. Didn't have the heart to throw him out, given he was . . . well, he wouldn't have been able to find another place to live without a lot of help."

"Was he disabled?"

"Not physically. People thought he was, uh . . . what do we call it these days? Cognitively impaired? But he wasn't, as it turns out. He was strange, a loner. He didn't have any friends or family, but over the years he'd created a body of artwork that's absolutely stunning. And nobody had seen any of it until after he died."

"Huh. How'd you hear about it?"

"A woman who lives in the building contacted me. She knew about my book—you know, *Fetish and Fantasy*, my study of contemporary outsider artists that came out with Yale last year?" She caught herself before rolling her eyes. Academics reminding everyone about their books with fancy-pants publishers, standard bullshit, but self-employment had trained her to keep her feelings to herself. "As soon as they discovered his notebooks and paintings, she knew she had something important on her hands and wanted to call in an expert. It's a good thing she did. I'm convinced Feliks Król

is going to rank as one of our most important outsider artists. There will be an exhibit, of course, and my editor has already approached me about doing another book.”

“So this is a big deal?”

“This is a *huge* deal. I’m good at recognizing talent. Your young friend Lucas is a good example. He’s a brilliant artist, but nobody’d heard of him until I put that show together. But this . . .” He shook his head, unable to find words. “There’s something uncanny about Król’s work. Even though he was completely untrained and used dime store materials, he had an amazing sense of composition and color, and the subject matter is unlike anything I’ve ever seen. It seems so innocent and childlike at first glance, but then you realize . . . it’s not innocent at all. The sheer weirdness of his vision reminds me of when I first saw Hieronymus Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights as a child, fascinating but at the same time, so unsettling. Wait till you—” He turned as a girl came out of the kitchen carrying a tray full of food. “Oh, Linnea. This is Anni, the detective I told you about.”

“Hey.” She nodded a greeting. “My shift’s over in a few minutes, okay?”

“No problem. We’ll be here.” He leaned over confidentially as she hustled to a table and dealt out plates of food. “She’s the one who contacted me. She’s involved in the art scene, so she recognized what she had on her hands. Say, while we wait, can we talk about money? I was trying to figure out your fees, but I couldn’t find your website, or even a Facebook page.”

“Probably because I don’t have one.”

“How do you do business?”

“Referrals. I’m a one-person outfit; I can’t take on too many clients at once.”

He nodded. “Right, gives you a sense of exclusivity. But that old rape case you helped solve a while back, that was front page news for weeks.”

“The lawyer I worked with still gets letters every week from convicts who want us to prove their innocence.”

“I’ll bet. The video of Jill McKenzie’s speech—man, that was all over Twitter. With a web presence, you could have leveraged that.”

“They don’t let you use Twitter in prison. Besides, those guys are looking for pro bono help. Wouldn’t do anything for my bank account.”

He laughed. “Duh. You could have connected with potential clients, high-profile clients. It’s basic identity management.” He added defensively, “I know, it sounds all capitalist and horrible, but you already have a public persona. Everybody does. Why not engage with it to get the kind of visibility you want?”

“Invisibility works for me,” she said, not bothering to point out that anyone who had arrested people with serious anger management problems in the course of their work guarded their privacy as a matter of personal safety. “I brought a standard contract,” she added before he could start planning her social media strategy. “Why don’t we go over it while we wait.”

He asked a few questions but seemed satisfied with the terms and said his grant could cover her hourly rate. That was good news. Depending on how long the job lasted, she might be able to dig herself out of debt and have some left over. He was signing the papers as the girl took a chair at their table. Though she was probably in her mid-twenties, she looked like a child, with her short blond hair braided in Pippi Longstocking pigtails. She was skinny and wore a scrap of a skirt, torn leggings, and thick-soled boots that didn't quite reach the floor. Her voice sounded young, too, high-pitched and childlike.

"You're the first private eye I've ever met. Can I see your gun?"

"I don't have one. I also don't smoke or drink bourbon or own a trench coat or a fedora."

"Aww, really?" She pushed out her lower lip, milking that child thing.

"The work I do is pretty dull, actually. It's mostly talking to people, digging through records, looking for things that half the time aren't there."

"Boo, that's no fun."

"It pays the bills. What can you tell me about Feliks Król?"

"He was old and hardly ever talked because he was really, really shy. We were friends, kind of, but . . ." She gave a little shrug. "It's hard to explain. I didn't have any idea he was an artist, not until I went into his room after he died. It's sad. He's going to be famous now, and people will pay a shitload of money for his stuff. But when he was alive, he was just one

of those people you avoid in case they ask you for money or act weird. Not that he ever did. He was . . . dignified? He didn't give a shit what other people thought."

Anni pulled a notebook from her bag. "Okay, let me get the basics. Feliks Król. That's a Polish name, isn't it? Was he from Poland?"

"I don't think so. He sounded American."

"How could you tell?" Sidlo asked. "He never talked."

"He talked to me," she said defensively. "A little bit. When he was feeling extra happy."

"Any idea of his date of birth?" Anni asked.

She shrugged. "No clue. He looked ancient, but people who lead a hard life like him, you can't really tell how old they are."

"You say you were 'friends, kind of'. What do you mean?"

"Well, we lived in the same building. It used to be divided up into tiny little rooms that were rented out to people, like—what was that called?"

"A boarding house," Sidlo said.

"Yeah. But now it's just a house a bunch of us share. I mean, it belongs to Jake, but he's cool. We all pay into utilities and taxes and it works out. My personal space is on the second floor, which is where Feliks's room is, so we saw each other almost every day. He didn't interact with anybody else, but with me, I don't know, he seemed to like me for some reason, and after a while it was as if I was accepted into his world, but on his terms. If I was too friendly, he would have freaked out."

“Sounds like the cat who lives in my backyard. He would bite my hand off if I tried to pet him, but we’re used to each other. I give him food, and he leaves dead things outside my door. I could do without the dead animals, but it’s how we bond.”

“Exactly,” Linnea said with a grin. “Feliks would leave me presents, too. Nothing dead, except sometimes bones. Little animal skulls. And flowers, little ceramic figurines, pretty buttons. He dumpster dived a lot, and if he saw something he thought I’d like, he’d give it to me, but only if I wasn’t looking. It took me a while to figure out where he got all this stuff. Then I saw him in an alley with a canvas bag he always took with him, picking through trash.”

Anni was struck by a sudden memory. “Wait. What did he look like?”

“I have a photo.” Sidlo pulled out his phone and scrolled with a thumb. “Jake sent me a . . . yeah, here we go.”

He passed his phone over. Anni studied the picture of an elderly man whose leathery face was caught in slanting late-afternoon sunlight. His cheeks were seamed with wrinkles and his tangled beard looked as if mice could be nesting in it. Wild eyebrows rose over eyes that stared to one side with fixed intensity from their sunken shadows. His red flannel shirt had a frayed collar and his pants were held up with suspenders. He’d been caught in a contemplative moment, a pipe in his hand, looking like a man who’d woken up in the wrong century and was wondering how to get back home.

“Good picture,” Anni said, handing the phone back. “I always thought his name was ‘Mr. Growl’.”

“Wow, you knew him?” Linnea asked.

“Only casually. I used to be a police officer. My first two years, I was assigned to a station on Wood Street. My field training officer pointed him out, a local character, crazy but harmless. Used to see him going down alleys, scavenging. Sometimes we’d get complaints, especially from people new to the neighborhood.”

He wouldn’t look her in the eye when she spoke to him, she remembered. He would just stare at his shoes, waiting it out, unimpressed by loud voices or threats of arrest, tuning it all out until it was over. “When you talked to him, it didn’t seem like he was taking it in. I thought maybe he was hard of hearing, but he always avoided those houses afterward, so he was paying attention. I would never have thought he was an artist.”

“Nobody knew,” Linnea said. “All those years, it was his secret world.”

“A beautiful, terrible world,” Ben said softly.

“Did he leave any personal papers?” Anni asked.

They both laughed. “About six tons of paper,” Ben explained. “Mostly old newspapers and magazines, but also boxes full of cuttings and photographs and God knows what all. Not to mention his sketchbooks and stories and paintings. We haven’t started processing the material. His room is exactly as it was when he left it.”

“I’d like to see it some time.”

Sidlo and Linnea exchanged looks. He said, "It's not far from here. How about now?"

The house was on a corner, a three-story building with gingerbread-festooned eaves and elaborate brickwork, built in the late nineteenth century by someone with a lot of money and plenty of servants to carry coal scuttles up and down the stairs. Though the neighborhood had been gentrified, with new condos sandwiched between restored Victorian-era homes, this one retained some of its boarding-house scruffiness. The trim around the roof and windows had been meticulously painted a jaunty rainbow of colors, but the porch had a ratty couch on it and the front yard held a jumble of boards, bricks, and loops of ancient electrical conduit. A faded plastic flamingo was stuck in a pile of dirty snow, tilting to one side.

Inside, the front hall was crowded with bicycles, boots, and coats hanging from hooks in the wall. It opened onto a high-ceilinged living room that had a couch and cluttered coffee table, a handsome fireplace, cans of paint and spackle, spat-

tered drop cloths, a ladder, and what looked like the engine block of a V-8 muscle car.

"How many people live here?" Anni asked as a hairy dog bounded down the hallway from the rear of the house, jumping up to lick Linnea's chin, then snuffling around, checking everyone's feet for interesting smells.

"Oh, maybe ten?" Linnea said vaguely. "No, eleven. People come and go."

A lean, rangy man with sandy hair worked into shoulder-length dreadlocks followed the dog, carrying a beer and trailing an aroma of coffee, cigarettes, and weed. "How's it going?"

"This is Anni," Linnea said. "She's a detective. For real."

"No shit?" He scratched his ear, his grin sheepish. Busted.

"A private investigator," Anni said. "These two have asked me to help him find out what I can about Feliks Król. Mind if I take a look at his room?"

"Up to Linnea. It's her stuff."

"Feliks left me everything," Linnea said, adding defensively, "in his will."

Anni couldn't hide her surprise, and Sidlo added, "He made it while at the nursing home. They're probably used to helping their elderly patients settle their affairs."

"He had a lifetime of creative work in his room," Linnea said. "He needed to be sure someone would take care of it."

Jake laughed. "Bet he figured he was taking care of you, leaving you all his worldly goods. Used to bring her donuts he rescued from behind a bakery on Milwaukee. Thought she

was a starving orphan. Well hell, you could be. You're skinny enough." Linnea stuck her tongue out at him. "They had this thing going," he told me.

"You make it sound nasty," she said, swatting his arm.

"No, it was like . . . like you were a penniless orphan and he was this secret rich uncle who wanted to make sure you had enough to eat and warm clothes. Seriously, it wasn't creepy or anything."

"When did you first meet him?" Anni asked Jake.

"Years ago." He frowned at the dog, who was nosing around the boots. "Feliks came with the place. Trotsky!" He took a rubber boot away from the dog. "Quit chewing on things. Dumb mutt, acts like a puppy, still. Yeah, Feliks was living here when my grandma died and left me this place. Had his room, had his routines. Didn't pay much attention to me."

"You never heard him talk about his past?"

"Never heard him talk, period. Not even hello. For the longest time I figured he was a deaf-mute. But I guess he just didn't feel like talking."

"And your grandmother didn't tell you anything about him?"

"Nah. To be honest, I barely knew her. My dad brought me to visit a couple times when I was a kid. She started renting out rooms to boarders after her old man died make a little money for herself. Put up partitions to carve up the space, had a bunch of old geezers living here when we visited. I was so confused. Thought I had, like, twenty grandpas, and

all of them had hairy ears and bad breath. When she had her stroke she was down to just a couple of guys, Pat and Feliks. I was living in New York when I heard she'd left this place to me. A bunch of us had just gotten kicked out of this cool warehouse space in Queens, some zoning bullshit. Anyway, I didn't have anywhere to stay, so when I got the news, I came here thinking I'd fix up the place and sell it, but, uh . . ." he looked around and shrugged affably. "The Chicago scene is cool. Decided I'd stick around instead."

"The other boarder, Pat—what happened him?"

"By the time I got here he'd set himself up in some old folk's place. Sent me a card at Christmas, so I guess he's still plugging away. Feliks . . . seriously, I don't know if he even noticed my grandma was gone. He just kept going like nothing had changed, like when the church where he used to work at laid him off. I only knew he lost his job when he quit paying rent."

"He just stopped?"

"Yep, without a word. Never paid much, anyway, five bucks a week, cash. My grandma must have forgot to raise the rent since about 1964."

"But you let him stay."

He seemed puzzled. "Where else would he go?"

"Right, rent's gone up since your grandmother's day. Was he on social security or Medicare?"

"Don't think so. He never got anything in the mail addressed to him, except Christmas cards from Pat. Ol' Feliks was pretty much off the grid."

“What did he live on?”

“Not much. He had the run of the kitchen and helped himself to coffee, but he wouldn’t take food from any of us.”

“He didn’t like our cooking,” Linnea said. “Too many icky vegetables.”

“He had a stash of dented soup cans he kept in the pantry, probably out of a Dumpster. Got some stuff from a church food shelf. Bread and peanut butter, things like that. He was super religious. Mega-Catholic.”

“Which church did he go to?”

Jake laughed. “Which one didn’t he go to? He went to mass at least once a day, sometimes two or three times. He used to walk miles to get to them all. That’s probably how he caught pneumonia, walking to church in bad weather.”

“That’s how he died?”

“He got a stubborn cough and couldn’t shake it off,” Linnea said. “It got worse and worse until one night we called an ambulance. It was awful. He didn’t want to go.” Her eyes welled up with tears.

“Hey.” Jake reached out to scoop her to his chest. “You did it to save his life.”

“He died anyway.” Her voice was muffled against his shirt.

“They kicked him out of the hospital, put him in some charity home run by nuns up on the North Side. He didn’t like it, didn’t last there too long.”

“It was as if he went inside himself,” Linnea said. “Deeper and deeper until he went out. Like a candle.” She sniffed and rubbed her nose with her sleeve.

"Later, we went in to clean out his room," Jake said. "I knew he had a lot of stuff up there. Wanted to figure out how big a dumpster I should rent. Turns out the place is full of art. Creepy art, too."

"Shut up. It's beautiful," Linnea punched his arm.

"But weird. Makes me wonder. I mean, all these years he seemed so . . . simple, you know? Only he wasn't." He tapped his head. "All kinds of stuff going on in there." He frowned, lost in thought for a moment before shaking himself. "Well, I should be getting stuff done. Make yourself at home." Jake waved his beer bottle vaguely at the stairs and shambled into the living room, the dog at his heels.

Ben expelled a heavy breath of air, as if he'd been holding it in impatiently. "Why don't we go up?" he suggested, and Linnea nodded.

Anni followed her up the wooden staircase to the second floor, an open, airy space domesticated with mismatched furniture, worn oriental rugs, and muslin curtains tied back from the tall arched windows overlooking the street. The sun had long since set, but a couple of lamps gave the big room a warm glow. Layers of wallpaper had been removed, but patches still clung to the mottled plaster, ragged strips of faded roses and blue-gray stripes. The floor had been stripped of coverings, leaving raw pine planks, gouged and stained. It looked improvised, like an abandoned house used as a squat, but a homey, welcoming one. "There used to be a hallway running along the staircase here," Linnea said, pointing at the roughened stains that marked the old boundaries on the floor.

“And a maze of little rooms. The only one left is that one. His room.”

It stood in a far corner of the floor like a giant packing box left behind, the walls still clad in tattered floral wallpaper. A brass number 7 was fixed on the wooden door. Below the number, in a knotty, elaborate script that for some reason made Anni think of the Cyrillic alphabet, Feliks Król was painted meticulously, the letters outlined in gold paint. Linnea unlocked the door, nudged it ajar, and reached in to switch on a light before he stepped back, inviting Anni to go first into the dim and crowded space.

It was like a lot of jam-packed rooms she'd visited when she was still on the job, called in when a landlord or neighbor realized something was wrong. Thankfully this time there was no smell of decomp, just the musk of old paper, dust, the funk of an unaired room, and a hint of something from the past, a pleasant smell that seemed out of place—school paste and tempera paint, she realized. She had to maneuver between stacks of bundled newspapers and magazines piled as high as her shoulders. Beyond the bundles, she glimpsed boxes stacked against the walls full of neatly sorted junk: rusty tools, old cans, glass jars, bits of hardware, wooden picture frames jumbled together, discarded toys. The top of a fireplace mantelpiece was filled with religious figurines and ceramic figures of children and animals. A sentimental painting of the Madonna and child hung over it in an ornate and chipped gilt frame. Shelves on either side of the fireplace were crammed with books stacked two and three deep and

laid horizontally atop one another, wedged into every possible space. What she could see of the walls above the bundles and boxes of junk was crowded with framed religious prints, wreathed with dust-furry cobwebs.

She felt the familiar tightness in her chest that came whenever she was in a small space, and she had to fight back an urge to leave. Instead, she groped her way forward, stubbing her toe against something. After probing she realized it was a bed frame completely buried in tightly-packed stacks of books and papers. "Where did he sleep?" she murmured to herself.

"That chair, probably," Linnea said, following Anni into the room and pointing to an open space in the center of the room, where a sagging armchair draped with blankets stood beside an oak table that was still set up for work, pans of children's watercolors neatly arranged around a half-finished painting of a boy dressed in ragged trousers running from a group of uniformed men armed with truncheons and guns, a burning city behind them. Spidery writing filled the margins of the painting, but the single bulb hanging from the ceiling wasn't bright enough for Anni to make out what it said.

A sheet of cardboard lying beside the painting had sketches on it, the same figure as in the picture drawn in a variety of poses as if for practice. There was a stack of five or six notebooks close by. She reached for one, then hesitated. It felt as if the whole room was a museum exhibit, but Linnea nodded her permission. Anni picked it up and opened the cover carefully. Inside there was a hand-painted portrait of a girl with

curly dark hair, a doll nestled in her arms, billowing clouds under her chubby elbows, bright rays of light shooting out from behind her head. *The Story of Inez* was written in elaborate script over the portrait, and she felt something icy slide down her spine. The girl with her dimpled cheeks and doll was familiar and completely out of place.

The child's portrait had been copied from a photo the police had given to the press after her murder, one of those cases that led to editorials in the paper and calls for reforming the child welfare system. Anni turned a page and saw meticulously detailed drawings in panels like a comic book with that crabbed writing spilling out into the margins. A yellowed newspaper slipped out from between the pages. Child Beaten, Starved Authorities Claim.

She set the book down carefully and opened another. It had several clippings in it, all from a horrible case. A drug-addled couple had kidnapped and smothered a toddler, then tried to conceal their crime by dismembering the body and scattering the parts in a public park. Król had illustrated the child's short life and gruesome death at length. "Are they all like this?" She nodded toward the stack.

"They're all about children," Linnea said.

"Ripped from the headlines." Ben stood behind Linnea, his hands on her shoulders. "When he read those stories in the paper, they must have affected him in some deeply personal way."

"They're mostly made up, though," Linnea added. "I mean, he starts with a story from the news, but things get mythical,

with dragons and angels and stuff. Fantasy. But they're definitely not for kids. They're pretty . . ."

"Dark," Ben said. "It's that juxtaposition of innocence with violence that's so striking about his work."

"Great," Anni muttered to herself. "I'm not sure how to approach this. There's too much to go through. I could start with public records, check with the churches—" She turned, ready to leave, feeling hemmed in.

"Wait, you haven't seen the altar yet." Sidlo's eagerness jarred with the unease she was feeling.

"Altar?"

"The best part." He pointed past the boxes that hemmed the table in. Feeling as if the room was closing in around her, she reluctantly made her way through the clutter to an elaborate piece of furniture pushed against the far wall. She couldn't make sense of what she was seeing at first, a jumble of junk climbing up the wall, defying gravity.

"Hang on, let me just . . ." Sidlo reached over some boxes and fiddled with something near the floor. Lights suddenly sprung on, strings of Christmas lights draped around an old-fashioned dressing table with the mirror missing. The drawers had been removed and narrow shelves had been affixed to the walls around it to support a towering conglomeration of found objects: toys, plastic flowers, strings of beads. There were dolls, statues of saints, peacock feathers, holy cards, baby dresses and tiny shoes, toy cars, stuffed animals peering at Anni with shiny glass eyes. It looked like the impromptu street shrines that sprout at sites of tragedy, but artfully con-

structed, like a baroque altarpiece made out of trash. It was sad and oddly beautiful—and disturbing. The dolls all seemed to be maimed: headless or missing arms or legs. The baby dresses and empty shoes were weirdly intimate and troubling.

“That’s really . . .” she started, but didn’t know what else to say. She sensed them watching her, waiting for her to say more. Buttons and beads and bits of broken glass were glued along the edge of the old dresser, she noticed, along with tiny white bones and fragile skulls of birds and rodents carefully arranged, like rococo trim on an antique chest. A teddy bear with loose stuffing dangling where its arm had been torn off slumped nonchalantly in the cavity where there had once been a drawer. Her eyes were drawn to a colorful pair of small sandals propped in its lap.

Familiar green and yellow plastic sandals with dinosaurs on the straps, one a triceratops, the other a stegosaurus. If she picked them up, she knew she would see molded shapes on the soles designed to leave an imprint of dinosaur tracks in wet sand. They were bright against the faded bear, so dusty its furry ears looked frosted. Beside the bear, tucked further back there was a folded shirt, a lime green shirt with puffy blue letters. She found herself reaching down toward the D with a fingertip, a jaunty capital letter next to a blob that was meant to be an A. Because it was folded, she couldn’t see the rest of the letters, the ones that spelled out Danny. She held her fingertip poised there, imagining how the lettering would feel, crusty and rubbery, though she didn’t touch it. She had never held the shirt, though it was instantly familiar

from the photo they had distributed everywhere, that she still encountered occasionally on grocery store bulletin boards, one face among many. Have you seen this child?

“Unplug those lights. They’re a fire hazard,” she heard herself say, her voice weirdly calm. “Then leave the room. I’ll follow you.” Sidlo and Linnea exchanged glances, then Ben started to speak, his face scrunched up in puzzlement. “*Out*,” she said. “*Now*.” He reached down to pull the cord out of its plug. The shrine went dark. They filed out of the room.

Outside, Anni took the key from Linnea, switched off the overhead light, locked the door, and stuck the key in her pocket.

“Hey, what’s this about?” Sidlo protested.

“You moved them.”

“I don’t know what—”

“Everything else was dusty, not the sandals, not the shirt. You put them there. Where did you find them?”

Sidlo shook his head as if to clear it. “Look, I’m not sure what you—”

“*Don’t*.” She took a breath, tried to swallow, but it felt as if there was a lump blocking her throat. “Don’t lie to me.”

“They were in one of the boxes,” Linnea said, and Sidlo winced with irritation. “Ben just wanted to make sure you’d notice them, that’s all. He didn’t mean to—”

“You moved them because you know who they belonged to. You know I was involved in that case.” She felt her hands clench, felt a shiver of fury. “You have no idea how much

this pisses me off.” She took out her phone and punched in a familiar number from another time.

They went downstairs and into in the messy front room. Jake looked up from the book he was reading. “You guys, listen to—hey, what’s up?”

“Are you part of this?”

“Me? No.” He closed the book, pressed it to his chest and looked between them. “Part of what?”

“He doesn’t know anything about it,” Linnea said.

Jake unfolded himself from the couch, picked up his empty beer bottle. “I think I’ll, um . . .”

“Don’t leave the house. The police may want to talk to you.”

He looked at Linnea, mouthed “police?” She gave an apologetic shrug. “Then I’ll just . . . yeah, guess I’ll be in the kitchen.” He loped out.

Sidlo tried to launch a defense. “Look, I understand you’re upset, but—”

“You knew those were Danny Truscott’s shirt and shoes when you found them.”

“Well, not at first, but there was a newspaper clipping that . . . yeah, we figured they might be his.”

“You knew, too?”

Linnea nodded, looking smaller and more orphaned than ever.

“You found what might be evidence of a crime and the first

thing you thought of was how you could use it for a stupid publicity stunt?"

"That's not . . ." Sidlo stuttered, then changed tack. "Well, sure, it would get people's attention. Is that so wrong?"

"You set me up."

"No, look, I hired you because I need help with a kind of research I'm not trained in. That's the bottom line, but given this connection—I figured you'd want to find out what happened to that little boy. You'd have a stake in it."

"It's a police matter now. It's nothing to do with me."

"But you were the one—"

"Look, I'm too angry to talk to you right now, so how about you just shut up until they get here, okay?"

Anni went to stand by the front windows, staring out at the street. Her hands were jammed into her jacket pockets, one of them wrapped tightly around the key to Feliks Król's door, the saw-toothed edge digging into her palm. Linnea watched her, nibbling her thumbnail. Sidlo paced restlessly.

"Will they want to search Feliks's room?" Linnea ventured to ask.

Anni laughed. It came out like a cough, and made her throat hurt.

"That's going to be a problem," Sidlo said. "I mean, they can't just tear the place apart. The room itself, the arrangement of all the elements, it's an important artifact. We need to document everything, make sure his work isn't damaged or lost."

"They'll need a warrant, right?" Linnea asked.

“They’ll get one.”

Sidlo sighed. “We’d better talk to a lawyer,” he said to Linnea. They withdrew to a far corner of the room. Anni could hear them murmuring indistinctly. She leaned her forehead against the front window, feeling the cold glass. Remembering.

Danny Truscott. He was three years old when he went missing. Her first major case. Her first experience with the press. Her first complete and total failure.

He'd be, what? Thirteen now. She tried to picture him, but all she could see was the photo they'd given to the media. A pointed chin, a shock of dark hair over brown eyes that looked serious and watchful.

The day he went missing, Danny was with his mother and sister at the Taste of Chicago, an annual event held downtown in Grant Park. They had come into town on the train, an adventure just for the three of them, but it was hot and muggy and they were all exhausted by the crowds and the noise. Cassie had nagged her mother into using the last of their tickets to buy ice cream, even though Joyce knew it would make the children thirsty and they'd be even crabbi-er. But a migraine that had started soon after they had arrived was blurring her vision and putting shimmering rainbows

around everything, so she gave Cassie the tickets and sat on a stone ledge in a scrap of shade while they went off to a stand not far away. Danny had to trot to keep up with his nine-year-old sister, who pushed through the crowds, clinging tightly to his wrist.

"It's not my fault. I only let go for a minute," Cassie said later, sullen and impatient. "Not even a minute, just long enough to give the man my tickets."

"Sweetie, nobody blames you." Joyce reached for her, but Cassie shrugged away, unwilling to be forgiven. She didn't need forgiveness. It wasn't her fault.

The second floor of Harrison had emptied out as it did on hot summer days, detectives tending to shootings, stabbings, domestic assaults and one case of a drunken man driving his car into a family picnic. Miraculously, nobody had been seriously hurt when the car mowed through lawn chairs and barbeques, coming to rest in a smashed picnic table, but the victims had pulled the driver out of the car and had beaten him senseless before the cops arrived to break it up. The fact that the car was stolen had complicated things. Anni was typing up witness statements when the call came. The sergeant who gave her the assignment told her it would probably be all over by the time she got there.

But it wasn't over. It was never over.

Brown hair, brown eyes, 32 pounds, 28 inches tall, wearing blue shorts, a lime green T-shirt with his name in blue letters, and yellow plastic sandals decorated with dinosaurs. They

questioned thousands of people, circulated fliers, hauled in sex offenders who had a thing for little kids, manned a tip line. Leads came in from as far away as Washington State and Philadelphia, but none of them panned out.

She spent hours at the parents' house in Evanston. Brian, the father, was rarely still, pacing and running his hands through his hair, talking a mile a minute; Joyce was mostly silent, staring into space, focusing on Anni's questions with difficulty, answering in monosyllables. Whenever the phone rang, she gasped, as if someone had touched her skin with an electric current. Cassie veered between being irritable and needy, acting much younger than her age. She was suffering, but nobody seemed to notice or care. And then there was Philip, their oldest son.

"That poor family." It seemed as if everyone who mentioned the case would slip that phrase in, with a shake of the head, a sympathetic wince. Philip was twelve years old, an angular bundle of ticks and grunts, prone to seizures, on special diets and supplements and receiving expensive behavioral therapy. But his father made it clear he would spare no expense to give his older son the best life possible. And he would never stop looking for Danny. Not ever.

Ten years later, and Anni had her first lead.

No, not hers. It wasn't her case anymore. She pressed a palm against the cold window until it went numb, then lifted it and watched her blurry handprint fade.

The unmarked car pulled up at last. Two people climbed

out, casting the kind of comprehensive look around the street that marked them as cops. One was a lean Black man with grizzled hair shorn close to his skull wearing a natty Burberry and checkered scarf. The other was a heavy-set white woman in a puffer jacket and wool cap. Linnea let them in, and they introduced themselves: detectives Harold Franklin and Shirley McGrath of the Chicago police department. Anni had met Shirley before, but didn't know her partner.

"Used to work with Jim Tilquist," he said when he shook her hand, his expression unreadable. Anni knew she was unpopular with many CPD officers after testifying against a fellow officer. Since she had been with Jim when he was killed, and survived when he didn't, she wondered if Franklin held her responsible for that, too. But whatever he thought of her, he kept it to himself, adding only, "He was a good man."

"The best," she said, her own voice sounding strange.

"How you doing, Anni?" Shirley pulled her cap off and shook out her hair, frizzy mouse-brown hair frosted with strands of white. "Must have been a shock, turning up those clothes after all these years."

"How exactly did that happen?" Franklin asked, looking at Sidlo.

He started to respond, but Anni cut him off, anger reigniting and making her voice shake with rage, though she kept her volume under tight control. "Feliks Król was a tenant here, rented a room upstairs for decades. He died a couple of months ago. These two found the clothing in his room, along with some twisted drawings that they think are valu-

able. They called me in on the pretext of researching background on this guy. In reality, they knew they had evidence related to Danny Truscott's disappearance and they placed it where I'd see it. They thought having me 'discover' it would get them in the news."

Franklin nodded thoughtfully and turned to Ben. "This man, Król—he was an artist?"

"A very gifted artist," Sidlo said. "In my expert opinion, he ranks among the most important outsider artists who ever lived."

"You don't say." Franklin took a step toward the stairs and looked up into the darkness. "Want to show us the way?"

"My lawyer has advised me that we shouldn't do anything until she arrives."

"Your lawyer." Franklin raised an eyebrow. He was as good as Sidlo at eyebrow semaphore, Anni thought.

"The room itself, the arrangement of artifacts, is a part of Król's work. I realize you'll want to search it, but we're going to have to set some ground rules."

Franklin rubbed his jaw. "Ground rules." He had a way of repeating words slowly and thoughtfully, as if turning them over to see what might crawl out from under them.

"This guy who died. Who owns his stuff?" Shirley asked. "He leave any heirs?"

"He didn't have any family," Linnea said. "He left everything to me."

"This was some verbal agreement, or—"

"A will. Feliks was worried about his stuff. He knew I would take good care of it."

"Sounds like it's might be worth something."

"The estate isn't settled yet," Sidlo said. "There are medical bills to pay. Funeral expenses. Any proceeds from the sale of his work will pay for all that. If you're insinuating—"

Shirley held up a palm. Easy, bud.

Sidlo rubbed the back of his neck. Took a deep breath. "Look, if it wasn't for us, his entire body of work would have been thrown in the trash, and so would everything else he had in his room, including that boy's clothing. We were able to find some evidence you missed all those years ago. Why are you acting as if we did something wrong?"

Anni could feel the anger buzzing in her head again, making everything in the room darken. She turned to Shirley. "Look, I'm done here. You have any questions, let me know." She gave her a card.

"Can you stick around a few minutes? Got one or two things."

"Fine. I'll be on the front porch. I need some air."

Shirley nodded, and turned back to Linnea. "You want to tell us more about your relationship with this man?" Anni heard her ask as she slipped out the door.

Outside, she sucked in a lungful of chilly air and gathered her hair, pulling it tight into a knot and then letting it go. She felt like taking a run. She felt like lighting up a cigarette, and she hadn't smoked in years.

She didn't like being used. She didn't like Danny Truscott

being used. And she felt sick, thinking of the publicity that would inevitably come. Cassie would be, what, now? Nineteen. A young adult trying to figure out her identity. It was a confusing age, one filled with desperation to fit in, to belong, to pass as normal while feeling anything but. Hard enough without being dogged by the knowledge that you were the last person to see your little brother before he disappeared, the person who let his arm go, just for a minute.

Anni hadn't talked to the Truscotts since she'd left the job. Before her resignation, she'd made a point of checking in with Joyce once a month to see how she was doing, to reassure her they were still looking, even though no new leads had surfaced. She didn't want to keep opening a wound, but Joyce seemed grateful for the contact, though resigned to the idea her son was probably gone for good in a way that Brian refused to be.

It was hard to imagine personalities more different. Brian had gone from being a small-time contractor to being a major property developer, deeply involved in the city's effort to replace massive failed public housing projects with mixed-income apartments. He had become a high-profile city booster and friend of everyone important at City Hall. He was also an outspoken and publicity-hungry advocate for children's welfare, appearing at gala benefits and charity auctions, frequently interviewed on television as an expert when another child was on the evening news, missing or murdered or abused.

In contrast, his wife shunned publicity. On the rare occa-

sions when she was caught on film, she appeared haughty and cold, when in reality Anni suspected her grief was simply too deep to share. Cameras loved Brian Truscott, with his firm chin and blue eyes; Joyce hated cameras and did everything she could to stay away from them. Anni wondered if whatever bonds held them together might finally unravel for good once the fact that there were new clues in Danny's case hit the news.

She realized the phone in her bag was ringing. She pulled it out, didn't recognize the number, and debated answering it. Had Sidlo tipped off the press already? After a moment's hesitation, she answered. She might as well find out if a journalist was already on it.

It turned out to be Josh, calling from the public phone in the hallway at the hospital. He spoke in a tense whisper. "Anni? Can you come get me?"

"I can't do that, Josh. I can stop by later during visiting hours, but—"

"No, listen. There's something weird going on. Are you sure you took me to the right place?"

"It's the hospital you've been to before."

"Yeah, I know it *looks* the same, but the people here—they aren't the same ones."

"They probably had some staff turnover since last time."

"No. You're not getting it. They look the same, but they're not. Like, my doctor? Somebody else took her place. I'm not sure how they're doing it, because she looks exactly like she

used to, she even sounds the same. But I can tell it's not her. I'm really scared. I need to get out of here. It's not safe."

"Josh, you'll be fine. Right now things don't feel right, but you have to stay there for a while. Look, if you're scared of your doctor, just ask if you can talk to someone else for now."

"But it's *not* my doctor; that's the point."

"Okay. Look, I know this is rough. Just take it easy, okay? And give it some time. It'll get easier in a day or two."

"I feel like I'm coming down with a cold."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

Behind her the door opened; Shirley McGrath came out onto the porch. She nodded and kept her distance so Anni could finish the call in privacy.

"That lake water's not very clean," he fretted. "It could be something worse."

"If it is, you're in the right place."

"That's a joke, right? I can't always tell. If you come, could you bring me something to read?"

"Sure. Anything in particular?"

"There's this new paper on Jones polynomials that I've been meaning to read. Or a copy of the *Economist*."

"Not sure about the paper, but I can probably manage the magazine. Look, I have to go, okay? I'll try to swing by tonight."

She dropped her phone back into her bag and turned to Shirley. "So. How's it going in there?"

"Franklin's waiting on the lawyer. I'm going to get a warrant started, make sure all our bases are covered." She rotated

her shoulders, linked her hands and stretched. "One good thing about working in the cold case unit, you don't have to worry about the clock ticking."

"That may change once the press gets hold of it."

"No kidding. They love stories like this. You're positive they're Danny's clothes?"

"No question. The shirt had his name on it, written in this goop kids use at birthday parties. He'd tried to write his name, but it was kind of a mess. It's his shirt. And the sandals, they were just like the ones he was wearing when he disappeared."

"What else did you see in there?"

Anni described the room, the altar. The fact Król wrote and illustrated gruesome stories about real children, children whose deaths were reported in the newspaper stories that he clipped out and collected. As she spoke, she was fingering the key in her pocket, rubbing the serrated edge with her thumb. When she realized what she was doing, she handed it over and Shirley chuckled.

"You don't trust them, do you?"

"Not for a minute. I'm not sure what's up with the girl, but Ben Sidlo knows how to get attention, and he's going to milk this for everything he can."

"You don't like him."

"That's not the point. He wants to drive up the price of this . . . this creepy stuff he thinks is art. And what's weird is it turns out I knew him. The guy. Feliks Król."

"How?"

"I was assigned to Wood, patrolled this beat. He was a neighborhood fixture. Everyone said he was harmless."

"You think he did something to the kid?"

"I don't know, but after seeing that room? Those pictures of his? There was definitely something wrong with him."

"Did you talk to him when Danny went missing?"

"No. Maybe. I thought we talked to everybody, but I don't recall Król's name coming up."

"People like that are easy to miss. Anything you can tell me about Danny's parents? We need to talk to them before this gets out."

"His father will probably call the news stations as soon as he hears. He's a media hound. It'll be harder on the mom. She may seem standoffish, but she's just reserved, the opposite of a drama queen. Danny's sister was kind of messed up about it. She's a teenager now. I don't know how she'll respond."

"Wasn't there a brother, too?"

"Older brother. He had some kind of developmental disorder; he was pretty severely disabled. Last I heard, he was in an institution."

"Jeez. That poor family."

"Look, I have to go."

"Sure. We'll be in touch. Sidlo says you agreed to do some research on—"

"Bullshit. I'm not doing anything for him."

"He showed us a contract."

"Does he seriously think I'll work for him after what he did?" Anni rubbed her face hard with both palms. "Listen, he

set me up. I don't trust him, and I'm not working for him, so don't worry. I won't get in your way."

"I know it's tough."

"*What's tough?*" She took a breath. "Sorry. Didn't mean to . . . I really have to go." She glanced at her wrist, where she didn't wear a watch.

"We walk in, me and Franklin, and pick up a case that someone else sweated over. Something that didn't get settled. It's hard to watch someone else start over with fresh evidence. Sometimes people feel like they're getting second-guessed."

"I hope you find out what happened to Danny, okay? But it's yours, now, and I'm fine with that. More than fine. Look, I need to see somebody in the hospital before visiting hours are over. You have my number."

Shirley nodded and held up the key. "We'll be in touch."

As she was driving to the hospital Dugan called, wondering if he should pick something up for dinner. Anni told him she was on her way to check in with her schizophrenic client. She wasn't sure when she'd be home.

"You okay?" he asked, picking up something in her voice.

"Oh, it's just . . . I'll tell you later."

She remembered she had promised to bring Josh a magazine and wasted too much time looking for a store that carried *The Economist*. By the time she got to the hospital, visiting hours were over. She left the magazine at the nurse's station and drove home, cursing the price of the parking ramp, Chicago traffic, and the stupidity of the bus driver who cut her off on Division. But as soon as she spotted Dugan's jeep parked outside her house, she felt something coiled tight in her chest start to relax.

He was lying on the couch, reading something on his

phone, resting a bottle of beer on his chest. "I wasn't sure if you'd be hungry, but—"

She didn't realize she was until she smelled the pizza he'd brought. "I'm famished." She flipped open the grease-stained box on the kitchen table and took a slice. "I knew we were meant for each other when you told me you like anchovies, too."

He sat up to make room for her on the couch as she grabbed a Leinie from the fridge. "Sorry if I was short on the phone," she said, settling beside him. "I was in a crummy mood."

"You had a long night. How's the kid?"

"He's fine. Well, he's hearing voices and thinks he's a mass murderer, but other than that he's okay, so far as I know. I didn't actually get there in time to see him. That wasn't what put me in a bad mood. I got this other job this afternoon, but I quit already, so . . ." She stopped talking long enough to take a bite. "Mm, good," she mumbled.

"Did you ever get any sleep?"

"A few hours. Where are your pants?" she asked, noticing for the first time that he was in his shorts.

"In the wash. I was helping my uncle with a leaky water heater. It's in a part of his basement that is kind of an adventure theme park. Never know what you'll run into down there. I put some of your stuff in to make up a load. Hey, don't look at me like that. I know how to do laundry. I studied it in college."

He let her finish the slice before he asked, "So, this job you quit . . . is it something you can talk about?"

She took a long swallow of beer and then told him. "I can't believe Sidlo tried to pull that on me," she finished. "And the way he's going to exploit this thing, exploit the family, it makes me nuts."

"I remember that case. That was Brian Truscott's kid, right?"

"You know him?"

He reached for his beer, took a swallow. "Who doesn't? He's on TV all the time. Likes to be the world expert on missing kids. I mean, it's awful that his child disappeared. That's the worst. But every time there's a case, anything to do with a kid, he's in front of the cameras. Enjoying himself."

"You got it. He's such a dick, and he'll be all over the news. What kills me is that Król was right under my nose."

"You think he—"

"I don't know what happened to Danny or if Feliks Król had anything to do with it. But there's something really spooky about that room. That old man was seriously messed up."

"Sounds like it. These notebooks and that altar thing, it's, like, actual art? I mean, worth something?"

"Worth a lot, apparently. It just seemed twisted to me. There was something about it . . ."

Dugan waited, still and patient. Sometimes she thought sitting next to him was a kind of mindfulness meditation-by-

osmosis. It could be dangerous, though. It was the kind of undemanding calm that coaxed confessions out of people.

"It . . . I can't describe it. It was all about children getting hurt. Real children, but turned into illustrated stories, kind of like comic books or fairy tales. Really disturbing stuff, but it's also . . ."

"What?"

The word, when it came to her, almost hurt to say out loud. "Kind of beautiful. Which creeps me out, because it's violent and horrible and makes me wonder whether this guy was the worst kind of pedophile. So that can't be beautiful, can it?"

Dugan shrugged. "We had this book at home, an illustrated version of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I used to look at the pictures from *The Inferno*. They were gruesome, but we loved that shit, all the devious ways people were being punished."

"I can just see you and your brothers doing that."

"You want warped, check out Dante. He came up with some nasty ways to suffer torment for eternity. Made paradise look awful boring in comparison. Listen, McGrath and Franklin are good. Those two have cleared up cases that seemed impossible."

"Hope they have better luck than I did."

"Luck's the word for it. You know how it goes. Sometimes you just get a break. Enough time passes, someone decides it's time to get something off their chest. Like with Sharla Peterson. Remember that one?"

"God, yes. That was horrible." The abduction and murder

of a baby was even more of a media circus than Danny's case. "One of Król's stories was about Sharla. He had clippings."

"Would never have been solved if one of her killers hadn't come to Jesus years too late."

"That whole thing was so random. So pointless. I wonder what Slovo thought of that? The guy who led the investigation."

"You were working at Harrison then?"

"No, it was before my time, but we overlapped for a while. He specialized in crimes against kids, but that case wrecked his head. From what I heard, he had an epic meltdown, broke some furniture, got put on leave. After that, he was done; he wouldn't touch anything involving children. I tried to pick his brain about Danny, but he wouldn't even talk to me about it." Then he had quit, abruptly, and left Chicago under a cloud. She wondered if he ever heard his big case was finally solved and how he would feel, learning it was just the desperately stupid act of a couple of drug addicts who got in over their heads. That the biggest case of his career, that one he worked so hard, only got closed years later because one of the killers decided to get it off his chest.

"A confession can come out of the blue like that. Or somebody gets careless and lets something slip that opens new avenues."

"Or the case is finally being handled by cops who know what they're doing, unlike the green idiot who caught the case."

"Anni, come on."

"I shouldn't have been in charge. I was new. I didn't know anything."

He was shaking his head. "Listen, I know how the brass thinks. As high profile as that case was, your boss would have taken it away from you in an instant if they didn't think you were doing it right. I'm sure you did everything you could, that anybody could do."

"I didn't find Danny." She got up to get another slice of pizza, even though she no longer felt hungry.

The next morning, even before Dugan left for work, her phone began ringing and wouldn't stop. As she had expected, Brian Truscott didn't waste time contacting the press, and reporters wanted her take on it. A local news channel ran film of him telling the public he had never lost faith that his son would be found alive. With the new evidence that had turned up, he was more optimistic than ever. He was being coy about exactly what new evidence had turned up, and Feliks Król's name hadn't been mentioned, but that wouldn't last long. Truscott wasn't the only one who liked being the center of attention. Anni figured Ben Sidlo was probably gearing up his own publicity campaign.

She kept her phone on vibrate, looked at the incoming calls to see if any were from clients or friends, and busied herself with some background work for Thea Adelman, who had picked a case out of a pool of possible wrongful convictions. The lawyer asked her to spend no more than a couple of hours to gather the basics, but Anni kept fiddling with it,

organizing news accounts, reading through court documents for ideas, tracking down current contact information for witnesses.

Around eleven a.m., she snatched her vibrating phone as it threatened to jitter right off her desk. She recognized the number and impulsively answered it.

"Az, I'll just say this once, okay? I know you have this crazy idea we're friends, but I'm not in a mood to talk, all right?"

"Ow, jeez. You don't have to yell."

"I'm not . . ." she started to say, then lowered the volume, realizing she was. "Hey, fine, I'll just hang up, then."

"No, look, it's just—man, I got the world's worst headache. My entire body has a headache. Uh, listen, I think I must have called you recently. At least, it looks like I tried your number."

"Yeah, you called."

He groaned. "In the middle of the night?"

"Around three a.m., I think. You sounded pretty hammered."

"Christ. Looks like I called nearly every one of my contacts, including the mayor's assistant. On her personal cell. What did I say, anyway?"

"You don't know?"

"I don't remember anything. Went on a two-day bender after I finally took the deal. Went out with some of the guys and kept going. Woke up at Belmont Headquarters an hour ago, sore as shit. I got bruises in the weirdest places."

"You got arrested?"

"No, I was in the locker room. You know Izzie Schultz, been patrolling the nineteenth forever? He saw me staggering around like an asshole in the middle of Lincoln Avenue and put me in his cruiser, took me in to sleep it off, even though I puked all over the backseat."

"Puke happens. He's used to it. What do you mean, you took the deal? What deal?"

"The *deal*. The buyout. I'm officially unemployed."

"What?" It took her a minute to process what he'd said. Az Abkerian was a local institution, an old-school newshound. His heavy-set figure in a rumpled suit had been a fixture at crime scenes for as long as she could remember. "That's crazy. How could they let you go?"

"Easy. Been around too long. My number was up."

"But . . . seriously, you're the best they've got. You've been nominated for a Pulitzer twice."

"Nice to know someone's keeping score. Unfortunately, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans when bean counters are in charge. These layoffs, they just kept coming. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later."

"Man, I'm really sorry to hear this. But you'll line something else up. You're a legend."

He laughed bleakly. "You're kidding, right? Haven't you noticed what's been going on in newsrooms lately? There are no jobs. Besides, I turn sixty next month. Who's going to hire an anachronism like me?"

"This stinks, Az."

"Yeah, well. It's not like I didn't see it coming. Only it

would have been smart to avoid nuking all my contacts. Drunk dialing in the middle of the night, jeez.”

“I was up anyway, working on something.”

“Anything I should know about?”

“Nah, just one of my kids. I got him admitted to the hospital.”

“The son of somebody famous?”

“You know I don’t talk about my clients.”

“Yeah, yeah. Only I’m going to have to hustle some free-lance stories, so you hear anything juicy, give me a call, will you?”

“Sure.”

“Wait,” he pounced. “What are you holding back?”

“What makes you think—”

“You hesitated, just a for a second there. You got something.”

She sighed. “You haven’t seen the news this morning?”

“I’ve been too busy trying to figure out how to handle all the bridges I burned.” She heard the faint tapping of keys punctuating his words. “Which is probably a complete waste of time, given—holy *shit!*” The phone barked in her ear as it hit something—the floor, probably. She heard him cursing in the distance before he picked it up again. “Fuck. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“There’s nothing to tell.”

“Are you kidding? I reported that case. Your case. You should have let me know.”

"I don't have anything to do with it. Shirley McGrath and Harold Franklin are the ones to talk to."

"And they'll tell me to talk to media relations, like working from canned press releases is my style."

"Why do you even want to chase a story that's already being covered? It's yesterday's news."

He started to speak, but it turned into a gusty sigh. "Thanks a lot. Rub it in."

"Az, I didn't—"

"No, you're right. Shit. I have to build up some fresh contacts before I can pitch any stories, let alone report them."

"I'm sorry. I only meant . . ."

"Yeah, yeah. I gotta . . ." He stalled out for a minute. It was the way he usually ended phone calls: "I gotta go." But this time, he had nothing to go to. He cleared his throat. "You got my number, right? Keep me in mind, okay? Even if it's some crappy human interest garbage. Or those liberal causes Thea Adelman's always yammering about. Kind of sob-story everybody posts to Twitter. Jesus."

"Why don't you write a book? You know everything there is to know about crime in Chicago."

"Oh, please."

"Seriously. All those stories you could tell? You could totally write a book."

"Koskinen, thanks for the advice, but I'm trying to pay the bills, here. Screw it. I gotta go make more apologies. Anything interesting happens, be a pal and keep me in the loop."

Ben Sidlo left messages on her phone. He was apologetic, charming, hopeful. He had been an idiot. He wanted to make it up to her. He still hoped they could work together. She almost sprained her finger, jabbing “delete” so hard.

“It’s not going to work,” Konstantin Slovo muttered, then glanced around to see anyone had overheard him talking to himself. It was a dark, damp evening in Boston. He was seated at the back of the Chinatown Cafe, on the bench closest to the toilets and a staff exit to the alley. Sometimes it was locked with a chain and padlock in violation of fire regulations, but it wasn’t tonight. He had checked out of habit. He also knew, without having to think about it, that there were five people standing at the counter, two couples in booths, and a table occupied by a family talking to each other in a dialect that sounded as if they were shushing each other, a different kind of Chinese than the sharper commands barked by the counter staff. Outside, the rain had turned into wet snow, falling in fat, lazy flakes, and the shoes of the customers in line squeaked on the linoleum floor, punctuated by rapid-fire thwacks as the man behind the counter cut up a roasted duck or a slab of barbecued pork. Slovo processed all that on one

channel while thinking through the problem, trying alternatives, weighing the options, all of them ending up in the same place.

Nowhere.

He felt it like a weigh in the center of his chest. He was the one who got her involved, the woman and her little boy. She didn't trust men with badges. Neither did Slovo, though he used to wear one.

He emptied his cup of tepid tea. Beyond the glass case where red-glazed ducks hung on display, through the front window and its neon sign, he saw the man he was waiting for stride into view. Faron's broad shape filled the front door as he set the bell over it jangling.

"Why you choose this place?" He squeezed into the booth across from Slovo. The legs of the table squealed as it shifted to accommodate his girth.

"It's cheap. It's good."

"It's in the ass end of Chinatown. There's no place to park. That guy with the hatchet scares me."

"Try the pork." Slovo pushed his Styrofoam container toward his friend.

"Nah, I'm heading home for dinner in a minute. Don't want to spoil my appetite. Don't want to spoil my marriage, anyway. Say, you catch that story out of Chicago on the news? The missing kid?"

"Something about Danny Truscott? We caught it at Harrison. My outfit."

"You worked on it?"

"Nope. I was on gangs, then. They put this kid in charge, a woman barely out of the academy. Headline news, but the investigation didn't go anywhere."

"She screwed it up, huh?"

Slovo shrugged. "There was a whole task force to screw it up. I only caught the tail end of the news. They found remains?"

"Just some effects. Clothing he wore when he went missing. They were in this artist dude's room, along with piles of newspapers and shit."

"What artist?"

"Some crazy old guy. A hoarder. After he died, the landlord found drawings of naked kids being tortured. They showed it on TV. Creepy stuff."

"But the boy—"

"Still don't know what happened to him, but it doesn't look good. Father was on the television, talking about being strong and shit. Me, I'd punch out anybody put a camera in my face, time like that." Faron was frowning at the roast pork as he talked.

"Go on," Slovo said. "I can't eat all this."

His friend grunted and reached for a pair of wooden chopsticks, slipped them out of their paper wrapper and snapped them apart. "Shouldn't be doing this. We're eating healthy these days. Salad for dinner. Tofu." He picked out a piece of barbeque, chewed it with his eyes closed, a look of rapture on his face. "Damn. So, how'd that meeting go yesterday?"

"Not good."

“Too many cooks. That prick from HSI, what’s his name? I knew he’d be trouble.”

“It’s not just the feds. Maloney’s being an asshole. He keeps threatening separation. Cooperate, or we take your kid.”

“He’s just using every tool he’s got. I mean, this thing’s hanging by a thread. They only got the one witness. The others are too scared.”

“For good reason. We had a deal. Then some jackass from Homeland Security gets involved and suddenly everybody has to stake out their territory. These guys could walk.”

“Don’t be so dramatic.” Faron reached for another piece of pork, then stopped himself and put his chopsticks down, took a paper napkin and wiped his fingers carefully, removing the evidence with forensic care.

“What are you hearing?” Slovo asked him.

“Me? Nothing. I’m not in the inner circle anymore. Though the boss did call me in this morning to ask if I’d seen you.” Faron glanced at him. “Don’t worry. Nobody knows we’re having this little chat, so you can quit looking at the back door like somebody’s about to bust through it. Just figured you should know. They don’t like it when you miss meetings.”

“I showed up yesterday.”

“After two no-shows.”

“My phone hasn’t been working right.”

“You’re in the middle of a major investigation. One you kicked off.”

“I didn’t bring in the feds.”

“Yeah, well, they tend to invite themselves. And they don’t like it when you go off the radar, or so I been told by my boss, who suddenly doesn’t like me so much.”

“Shit. I know it’s a mess. I don’t want to jam you up, too.”

Faron pointed at the meat. “What do you think this is? Making me risk my health, tempting me to eat something that actually has flavor?” He used his crumpled napkin to scrub a spot on the table, then set it beside the accorded wrapper from his chopsticks, lining them up neatly. “Listen, I don’t know what you’re thinking these days, what you got up your sleeve, and don’t tell me, ‘cause I don’t want to know. But whatever it is, it better be good. If this thing falls apart, the shit’s going to fall on you. Hard.”

The table groaned as Faron braced his palms against it and got up. “Time I went. Got my rabbit food to look forward to. Something vegan, whatever that is. Used to be we’d have pork chops, cornbread, braised ribs, sweet potatoes. Real food. One little heart attack, and my wife’s all over my ass.”

“It’s working. You haven’t had one since.”

“Haven’t had a decent meal, either. You watch out for yourself, Slovo.”

“Say hi to Lonnie for me.”

“Now, why would I do a fool thing like that? I haven’t seen you in ages.”

Faron walked away, reaching his hand back to shoot him with a finger gun. Slovo went back to his meal, working his way through rice and roast pork, not tasting any of it.

By the time all that was left in the Styrofoam container

were a pile of crumpled napkins and bones he had figured out what he had to do. He just wasn't sure how he was going to pull it off.

For two weeks Anni kept her head down and managed to stay out of the unfolding story as Brian Truscott commanded as much media attention as he could. She filled her days handling routine tasks for a lawyer's collective, doing locates, serving papers, and interviewing witnesses in parts of town where it was virtually guaranteed she wouldn't run into reporters. Her schedule was full, but her bank account wasn't. She ended up working more hours than she billed, just to keep busy.

Dugan wasn't faring any better. He had been pulled away from homicides and assaults to work on something that involved endless meetings at headquarters where most of the time was spent (in his words) comparing dick sizes. He couldn't tell Anni what it was about, other than that it was a bullshit assignment, the kind of politically sensitive tango with politicians and lawyers that had driven him to transfer from a high-level administrative position to fill the position

Anni had left, joining a violent crimes detective squad on the West Side. His mother still held it against him. She was used to being a police family, used to her children wearing a gun to work, but he was her youngest, the one who wasn't supposed to be in harm's way. "At least the squad's not shark-infested, like headquarters," Dugan had told her, but she just swatted at him with a dish towel.

Anni understood his mom's relief, but leaving colleagues to deal with violent crimes while he sat in conference rooms shuffling papers made Dugan grumpy. He dealt with it by getting out his tools and prepping his garden and Anni's backyard for spring. It was too early to plant anything, but he spent his off hours digging holes and moving dirt, which always cheered him up.

One afternoon Anni dropped by the hospital to see Josh. As she exited the elevator that took her to the psych ward, she spotted his mother at the end of the hall, trudging toward the elevators head down, everything about her sagging. When she saw Anni, she straightened her shoulders and smiled broadly. "Anni! Have you come to visit Josh? That's so sweet of you."

"I was in the neighborhood. How's he doing?"

"Much better. His doctor thinks he may ready to go home at the end of the week. The only question is which home. I want him to stay with us for a while, but he's so determined to get back to his classes, and he doesn't want to commute." She laughed. "I suppose that means *I'll* be the commuter, dri-

ving down to see him. Making a nuisance of myself. Isn't that a mother's job?" She reached out to give her wrist a friendly squeeze, and Anni forced herself not to recoil from the woman's bony grip, her expensive bangles and chunky rings and polished nails. "I saw your name in the newspaper. That little boy. So awful for his mother. And poor you. That must have been such a shock."

"The police are handling it. I don't have anything to do with the case anymore."

Donna tightened her grasp, her eyes squinched in sympathy, before finally letting go. "Oh, we're planning a fundraiser next month. A wine tasting with local artisanal cheeses. I've lined up the best speaker, the woman who wrote that book about her daughter? You must know who I mean. She was on *Ellen* a few weeks ago. I'll make sure you get an invitation." Anni smiled politely, but she didn't have the funds to attend a fancy fund raiser, even if she wanted to, which she didn't.

Josh did seem better that afternoon, able to joke about the delusions that still haunted him, but prone to long moments of spaced-out distraction. He was determined to return to his apartment and his classes. He found comforting symmetry in higher mathematics, but Anni had a hard time imagining that he would be able to manage daily life anytime soon. She left the hospital certain she'd be hearing from the McLarens again before long.

Money was worryingly tight. In the previous three weeks, she'd had only one assignment from parents worried about

a child. A girl she'd worked with several times during her high school years was now in her second semester at a posh college in Maine. Her parents had gotten nervous when she stopped answering her phone. The Dean of Students assured them there was no cause for concern, but the parents thought he was blowing them off. At their insistence, Anni flew out to check on the girl. As it turned out, she was fine, just tired of being hounded by her hovering parents. She'd lost her phone accidentally on purpose and was embarrassed and angry when Anni showed up. The trip had been expensive, and their check for time and expenses was late.

Even worse, she got home to find whatever she earned would have to go into home repairs. A storm had torn a limb from the walnut tree in her back yard, breaking a window, letting wet snow blow in. Adam Tate, her downstairs tenant, had a genius IQ, but a serious lack of common sense. He told her he had wondered why the light wasn't working in his kitchen. He hadn't noticed the big tree limb that was stuck like a fork into the back of the house until Anni pointed it out. When she climbed a ladder to see how much damage it had done to the roof and the gutter she realized it wasn't just a few shingles that had come off in the spring storms. The whole thing needed reroofing. Great.

Once, when she worried out loud about keeping the house, Dugan raised the possibility of her moving in with him. She rejected the idea flatly, then worried that she'd hurt his feelings with her snap response. It actually made a lot of sense; they'd save money and she was already spending half

her time at his place, but she was too attached to the wooden floors she'd stripped and sanded, to the antique windows her brother had helped her install, too aware of the need to have her own space. It turned out he felt the same. Neither of them wanted to give up the life they'd fallen into so easily, close but not crowded.

Whenever work dried up she worried she'd lose the house. Leaving the job had been hard for a lot reasons, but now she was becoming seriously anxious. It made her toy with the idea of signing on with one of the big firms, but when she went to police headquarters to request some records, she found herself in line next to a man who bragged about working for a company that had offices in six cities. By the time she got to the counter, she'd heard enough to know that she would only go that route if she got desperate. Things weren't that bad yet, but there was no question she was going to have to pick up some work, and soon.

One afternoon Donna McLaren called to tell her Josh had been discharged. She had just dropped him off at his apartment near the University of Chicago. "I don't think he's ready for this," she told Anni. "But he's absolutely insistent. I want you to keep an eye on him for me."

"Check in with him every couple of days?"

"No, *really* keep an eye on him. See what he's doing, where he's going, if he's okay—at least for this first week. He doesn't have to know. You do that sort of thing, right?"

Anni suppressed a sigh. "I don't think surveillance is the

way to go. It would take a team to do it right. Besides, it's not how I do things. I need Josh to trust me."

"Well, I know, but—"

"I can visit him every day, if you want. At least until things settle down."

"The thing is, he might not—" She broke off and sighed impatiently. "He has anger issues."

"That's common after a hospitalization."

"It seems worse than usual. He was completely unreasonable about staying at home, even for a little while. He just got out of the hospital, for heaven's sake. I'm just asking you to keep an eye on him. Isn't that what we're paying you for?"

"You're paying me to provide a certain level of safety for your son when he's in crisis. Surveillance would be counter-productive, in my opinion. I could give you the names of some other firms that—"

"No, that's not what I want." She sighed. "It's just so frustrating. He's not in a fit state to be on his own. Anything could happen."

"Will he be seeing his doctor regularly?"

"They have appointments set up, and he seems to like her." She made the admission grudgingly.

"That will help. I know it's difficult, but you can't lead his life for him."

"You sound like George. He told me this morning it's time to cut our losses. *Cut our losses?*" Her words grew taut, squeezed out and trembling, on the verge of tears. "How can you speak about your own child that way?"

“He didn’t mean it like that,” Anni murmured automatically. It wasn’t the first time Donna had broken down on the phone. “He’s just . . . I know this is hard for both of you.”

She hiccupped and blew her nose. “He doesn’t know what it’s like to be a mother. No idea at all. You’ll check on Josh for me? Every day?”

“I’ll go right now if you want.”

“Please do. Oh, and would you send your invoices to me by email?” The Hotmail address she read out—Sailor-Donna61—was clearly a personal one.

“You don’t want them to go to your office manager anymore?” Anni asked.

“After what George said? I’ll be writing the checks on my own bank account from now on. Let me know how he’s doing. I expect regular reports.” Anni heard her give a final, fastidious sniff.

As Anni headed out to her car, she thought about the implications. George had always let Donna take the lead in child-rearing and its discontents, but it sounded as if he was getting fed up with the drama, or maybe the expense. Anni had been caught in the middle in these parental disagreements before. It wasn’t pleasant, and it often meant she didn’t get paid on time, or at all.

She prowled the streets until she caught a parking space two blocks away from Josh’s apartment building, then called him as she strolled to the building’s front door. “It’s Anni. I’m right outside. Can I come up?”

He didn't respond for a moment. "Okay."

He buzzed her in. It was one of those well-preserved brick apartment buildings interspersed with modern townhouses and condos in a leafy enclave of privilege on the South Side. The last time she'd been there, blue police lights flashed outside and the foyer had been jammed with residents upset by the ruckus Josh had made before disappearing into the night, shouting scary things. Now it was quiet, a few fliers littering the tiled floor of the foyer advertising pizza specials. She started up the three flights of stairs to Josh's apartment, one of three that shared a landing.

"Whoa," Anni said as he let her in. Books and papers were strewn everywhere and the furniture was pulled away from the wall and upended. When his psychosis was quiet, Josh was obsessively neat, creating the kind of right-angled order around him that her brother Martin imposed to assure himself that things were safe and under control, but this morning Josh looked defeated by the wreckage left in the whirlpool of his latest episode. "Some mess you got here."

"I suppose my mom sent you."

"Yep. You know how she gets. I told her I'd be stopping by every day for a week or so. It'll make her feel better and it'll keep her off your back. Want some help straightening this up?"

"No. I have to figure out where everything goes." He picked a book up off the floor, looked around, and set it on the windowsill. "I thought there were bugs in here. Not the kind spies use, real bugs. Insects. I kept seeing things mov-

ing out the corner of my eye, so I was trying to figure out where they were coming from. I have to buy a new mattress. I threw my old one away.”

“Seriously?”

“Whenever I tried to sleep on it, it felt like it was moving. Like they were swarming inside.”

“Eww.”

“I pushed it off the back porch and dragged it over to the dumpster. It’s not there now. Somebody probably took it. It was a nice mattress.”

“Where will you sleep?”

“On the couch, I guess. Glad I didn’t throw that out. I tried, but was too heavy.”

She laughed. He smiled tentatively. For a moment there, looking into Josh’s uncertain eyes, she felt a wave of tenderness for this kid who was so smart, so lost. So frightened.

“I don’t have time for this.” He nudged at a pile of toppled books with his toe. “I need to get in touch with Dr. Lammert.”

“What’s the rush? You just got out of the hospital today.” She had met Lammert, his research director, a soft-spoken man with a full beard, wire-rimmed glasses, and a wardrobe full of jeans and denim shirts that were usually decorated with chalk dust. He seemed unusually patient and understanding, willing to help Josh work through the university bureaucracy when things were out of whack.

“I’m way behind on everything.” Josh worried at the ragged skin on the side of his thumb with his teeth.

“One thing at a time. Let me help you move the couch, anyway.”

She got him focused long enough to get the largest pieces of furniture in place and papers and books gathered into piles for sorting. He sat on the couch when they were finished, relieved but still looking anxious, jiggling one knee.

“That’s a start, anyway,” she said. “Happy to be out of the hospital?”

“Yeah. I hate it there, though home would have been worse.”

“What’s so bad about home?”

“It’s like being back in high school.”

“God. I hated high school.”

“It was awful. The other kids always knew what was going on. I used to think there were messages going out on a frequency I couldn’t hear. Telling them everything.”

“You were a good student, though. Your mom says you had some crazy-high grade point average. Above 4.0. How does that even work?”

“You get extra points for taking AP classes, which is stupid. I didn’t have trouble with classes. Just the rest of it. It was . . .” He drifted, gnawing at the skin around his thumb.

After a minute she said, “Josh? You seem kind of checked out.”

“They’re taking my thoughts,” he said, then glanced at her, embarrassed. “I didn’t mean to say that. Stupid brain.” He tapped his knuckles against his forehead. “What I meant to say . . .” He closed his eyes to concentrate. “Right. High

school. My parents always wanted me to be part of the scene, make the right connections. It's all about connections. I couldn't figure out how to do it, though. Everybody thought I was weird."

"What about your grad program? You have friends there."

"They think I'm weird, too. They just don't mind as much. I have to contact Dr. Lammert. Should I call him on the phone? What if he's busy? Or in class?"

"You could send him an email and ask him if there's a good time to meet."

Josh nodded and exhaled, as if he'd just done something exhausting. "That could work. But I'm going to take a nap first. The drugs make me tired."

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow. I'll come by around six if that's okay?"

He stood as she opened the door. A man was leaving the adjoining flat, wheeling a bike out onto the landing. "Hey, Josh! How you doing, man?"

"I'm okay."

"That's great." He smiled at Anni. "I think I saw you that time—" he started to say, then broke off awkwardly. That time Josh was flipping out.

"Anni." She held out a hand.

"She's, um . . ." Josh stared at his feet.

"Friend of the family," she said as they shook.

"I'm Kyle. Josh saved my butt in Calc Three. Thought I was good at math until I got to college. Hoo boy, I had catching up to do. Great to see you back, man!" Kyle gave Josh

a friendly punch on the arm. Josh rubbed it, smiled vacantly before closing his door on them.

“Are you a grad student, too?” she asked Josh’s neighbor as she headed down the stairs with him, his bike hoisted to his shoulder.

“I’m working on an MBA, but it’s hard to fit all the homework in. I’m part of a startup, and it’s, like, crazy hours I’m putting in. We’re about to roll out MiMi, this great cloud-based platform that integrates all your social media into an agile mobile platform.” He had the energy and total self-absorption that Anni remembered from guys she’d known in college who had no doubt that everyone would be fascinated by anything they had to say. “You might have heard of us. *TechCrunch* did a piece last month.”

She tried to look politely interested, but he went on without noticing her effort.

“MiMi has great analytics. A dashboard for tracking all your interactions, plus an ambient awareness tool that uses machine learning to notify you about where your brand should be at any given moment.” They made it down the three flights of stair as he babbled happily. “Big data on a human scale that gives you control. It’s going to be seriously disruptive. If you’re looking for investment opportunities, you could get in on the ground floor.”

“Yeah, well, my house is looking for a new roof, so that’s not going to happen.”

“Too bad. Could make a killing when we go public.” He wheeled his bike outside, glancing at his phone.

“You’ll probably be seeing me around. I told Josh’s mom I’d check on him.”

“I met her. She’s pretty intense. Told me to give her a call if Josh starts acting weird again.”

“Call me instead. I could get here quicker in an emergency.” She gave him her number, which he conscientiously thumbled into his contacts. “Sounds like you’ve known Josh for a while.”

“We were both math majors. He was a lot smarter than me, though. Still is, even with code, which is supposed to be my thing. Few months ago, I was busting my butt trying to figure out this visualization program I pulled from Github? Kept crapping out on me. He figured out what was wrong in, like, five seconds.” She started walking toward her car. Kyle walked alongside, wheeling his bike. “Guy’s a genius, and he’s been incredibly helpful with making connections for our latest round of funding. Half our investors are people he grew up with.”

“That’s handy.”

“My dad’s a dentist downstate. I thought we were rich until I got here. Josh’s family? It’s a whole different level. Weird how things go. He’s rich and smart and connected, but . . . you know.” He shrugged. “Thanks for your contact info. I’ll send you our site, in case you change your mind about investing.” She felt her phone vibrate in her hand. “There’s some cool demos, check it out.” He spoke absently, already distracted by his screen. She left him busy thumbing a mes-

sage while standing astride his bike, catching up on business before heading to wherever he was going.

Having a job to do on the South Side meant she could use Dugan's flat as a temporary home base for the week. His garden apartment in a Victorian house belonging to his aunt was only a few blocks from Josh's apartment building. It turned out to be a good idea to stay close; Josh was taking more of her time than she had expected.

"How's he doing?" Dugan asked one evening, reaching for a beer and loosening his tie in a familiar routine.

"Lousy. He was too far behind and had to withdraw from his courses. He's angry. Thinks his professor and the other grad students are plotting against him. He'll be back in the hospital before long."

"Do you think he might act out?"

"He's just frustrated. He's never been violent."

"Maybe. Don't take it for granted, though."

He was looking for a way to say "be careful" without actually saying it, knowing she tended to bristle if he was too protective. She nodded. "How's your stuff going?"

"Same old bullshit. Wish I could . . ." He rubbed his head. "This isn't what I want to do with my life, you know? But it won't last forever. Hey, it's a nice evening. You want to help me turn over the compost?"

She laughed. "How romantic. Sure." There was always something outside that needed attention. The physical work

did them both good and Dugan's garden was an oasis of order and peace in a world short of both.

She called Josh's mother every morning to report in. Donna's tendency to make the best of things led to her sunny opinion that Josh was doing fine, even though Anni did her best to explain that he wasn't, not really.

After Anni had sent her first invoice, Donna called to say daily visits were no longer necessary; Anni would only have to check in once a week for the next month, just in case. Though Donna made it sound as if she was convinced her son was on the mend, Anni couldn't help thinking she'd simply realized for the first time just how much a private investigator cost. As Anni gathered up her things scattered around Dugan's apartment to return to her West Side home, it was reassuring to know that Josh's neighbor Kyle had her phone number. She had a feeling he'd be using it before long.

She threw a load of laundry in the wash, dealt with the mail that her downstairs neighbor had collected for her, and then took a run around her neighborhood. She'd grown lazy over the winter, and though it was a perfect spring day, her three-mile route seemed twice as long as it used to be. She couldn't help thinking about the most recent email from Ben Sidlo. He had sent several messages over the past three weeks, brimming with the expectation that she would eventually get over her fit of pique and take him up on his job offer. His latest email told her he was thrilled to report that he'd secured addi-

tional funding for their project. She could become a salaried member of the research team for the duration of the two-year grant. Even though he called it a part-time work, the weekly stipend he proposed was substantial. She would be able to pay for a new roof and start to fill the hole in in her savings.

Or get nailed for ag assault. She wasn't sure she could spend ten minutes with Sidlo without punching him.

After her run, she was drinking a glass of water at the sink when her phone rang. She checked the ID and reluctantly answered.

"Hi, Anni, it's Shirley. Shirley McGrath? Working on the Truscott case?"

As if she could forget. "How's it going?" Anni said automatically, though she didn't really want to know.

"Slower than I'd like. It's taking too much time to get through Król's stuff. You'd think those piles of junk were the Dead Sea Scrolls, the way that professor acts. Also, the family's being difficult. One of them's too helpful, and the other one isn't any help at all."

"I'm not surprised."

"Between you and me, Brian Truscott is a horse's behind. Unfortunately, he's also well-connected. Makes a point of referring to the superintendent by his first name, like they're best buddies. Who knows, maybe they are. Truscott's got all kinds of juice with the city, major contributor to this and that."

"You must be getting a lot of pressure to close this one." Anni had avoided news about the case, but it was impossible

to miss it completely. Brian had enough of a media presence to score some national television interviews and get the story rehashing Danny's disappearance picked up on newswires. Sidlo had done his part, acting like some kind of artist profiler, describing Król as a tormented genius, implying there was a lurid story yet to be uncovered. Az Abkerian had called, trying to get a quote for a story he was pitching to a website that mingled news stories with listicle clickbait. He sounded embarrassed about it and took her "no comment" without putting up a fight.

"Yeah, we don't usually get this much media attention. Not surprising the brass is getting a little antsy. Say, reason I called, I'd like to get together, go over some things."

"I doubt there's anything I can add now that will help."

"Still, I need to run through the previous investigation with you. Maybe while we're at it, you can give me some pointers on working with the mother. I'm having a hard time getting a handle on her. If I didn't know better, I'd think she didn't want to help."

"She's just reserved."

"Hmm. With her husband being Mr. Positive Thinking, I can see why she might want to keep from getting her hopes up, but it's like pulling teeth to get a word out of her. Apparently you kept in touch, though."

"Well, just—you know. I would check in now and then. I never had anything to tell her. Just wanted her to know we were still trying."

"It made a good impression. I definitely get the feeling she'd rather talk to you than to us."

"I doubt she wants to talk to anybody. Not about this."

"Got to be the worst, not knowing what happened to your child. Anyway, any chance we could get together this morning?"

"Uh, well . . ." Anni wanted to say she was too busy, but though Shirley sounded relaxed and friendly, Anni was sure she wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Is there a coffee place near you?" Shirley coaxed. "I'll buy."

Anni suppressed a sigh. She'd been expecting this call for the past three weeks; it was time to get it over with. "Do you know Café Colao? It's on Division, a couple of blocks east of the park."

"I'm sure I can find it. Does half an hour from now work for you?"

Shirley had arrived first and had snagged a corner table, marking her place with a tote bag set on a chair and a plate with two pastries on it in the center of the table. She was leaning on her elbows on the front counter, having a chummy talk with one of the owners, totally at home. Anni ordered a coffee at the counter and they took their seats.

“Cute place. The street’s looking up.”

“Don’t say that too loudly. Gentrification’s a sore point.”

“We were just talking about that. The alderman is always trying to play down the gang violence, but then has to back-track to get an increased police presence so new homebuyers feel safe. Speaking of trendy, did you catch Ben Sidlo on the radio last week? He took a public radio reporter into that room. They posted photos of it on their website. Some of those paintings, too. We’ve been getting a lot of calls.”

“Jeez. I can imagine.”

“All these people who suddenly realize they knew there

was something funny about that old man. Now they're upset, knowing he'd gone through their trash, attended mass at their church. Not that they actually can tell us anything useful." She shrugged, then pulled files out of her tote bag, along with a pad of yellow paper and a pen. She reached for one of the pastries, frowning, and broke it in two, examining the filling and taking a nibble. "What is this stuff?"

"Guava," Anni said.

"Never heard of it. Some kind of fruit?" She took a bigger bite, wiped crumbs from the corner of her mouth. "You're going to have to eat the other one. I'm trying to lose weight."

Anni took it, suddenly craving the familiar combination of flaky pastry and sweet, jammy filling.

"That Ben Sidlo's a stitch," Shirley said, before popping the last of her pastry into her mouth. "Franklin calls him 'the Little Professor.' Not to his face, of course, but I might just slip up one of these days. He's like those nerdy boys in middle school who want attention and can't stop talking. He still doesn't get why you were mad at him."

"I know. He keeps sending me emails."

"Probably figures you'll be won over by his charm. Apparently a producer from *48 Hours* called the other day."

Anni groaned.

"I doubt anything will come of it," Shirley said. "There's no story there, not yet, anyway. It's just that those pictures are really . . ." Her words dwindled away.

"I know. They creep me out."

She nodded. "Did you ever deal with child molesters?"

“Sure. Hated those cases.”

“I had this guy, once. We got him for messing with his neighbor’s kid. He wasn’t all there, brain damage or something. I remember going home and telling my husband I wasn’t sure I could do this job anymore. It’s not like I hadn’t seen the worst that people can do to each other. I’d seen plenty. But when I went to that house and arrested him, he gave me this look, and it was like a door opened up and all this cold, dank air came out. Like suddenly I could see there was another world right next to mine, some nightmare place, where this pudgy, pale guy with his thick glasses and weirdo smile lived. A place he thought was normal.” She shivered. “Being in the same room with him made my skin crawl.”

“How I felt in Król’s room.”

She nodded, then took a breath and laid her hand flat on the files. “Records from your investigation. I thought you could take me through it, make sure I’m not overlooking anything.” She picked up her mug and looked down into it. “You ready for another cup?” Anni shook her head. Just looking at the files made her feel jittery.

Shirley headed to the counter for a refill and Anni reached for the file on top. It was strange to see her own paperwork. She winced at the wording in the first report she’d written about Danny, so carefully composed, so wordy and stiff. It took her back to that day ten years ago, to the uncertain, inexperienced detective she was.

That afternoon it had felt good to get back to Area 4 Head-

quarters after spending two hours taking witness statements in Garfield park where a family picnic had been crashed, literally, by a drunken relative in a stolen car. She had been overdressed for the hot, muggy day and her blouse had gotten soaked with sweat under a jacket that now hung over the back of her chair, rumpled and limp. She had only recently been promoted and had maxed out her credit card buying clothes that were supposed to give her the authority that she had yet to earn. The new clothes fit better than the uniform ever had, and it was a relief that people didn't give her the side-eye constantly, assuming she was out to hassle them. But the street clothes couldn't hide the fact that she was the youngest detective in the unit and by far the least experienced. Most of her colleagues were in their forties and fifties and had spent years in uniform or plainclothes tactical squads before moving upstairs. She was in her mid-twenties and had spent only two years in uniform before getting the assignment she'd always wanted. She worked hard and tried to be both deferential and a go-getter, but never stopped feeling that she was an imposter who could be exposed at any minute.

She had just taken a break from typing up statements and was carrying a cup of coffee back to the computer when she saw the sergeant at the front desk set the phone down, frowning at two pieces of paper in his hand. "Got something?" she asked.

"Must be the heat. What is it out there, ninety-five? Gets hot like this, all hell breaks loose."

“Want me to take one of those?”

“You’re working that thing in the park.”

“Just reports; they can wait.”

He studied her. She kept her chin up and tried to look taller, not easy given he had a foot on her. After a moment of thought he started to extend one of the sheets of paper when the door to the squad room opened, and his face darkened. “Where the fuck you been?”

“My alarm didn’t go off.” The man who slouched in looked as if he’d just climbed out of bed, with uncombed hair, a scruffy beard, and sleepy eyes. He always looked that way, except when he had to clean up for a court appearance. Anni hadn’t worked on any cases yet with Konstantin Slovo, and didn’t expect to. He preferred to work alone, keeping his massive network of informants to himself. He breezed through the office at odd hours, often heading home just as the rest of the detectives were arriving at work. He didn’t go out to the bar with the guys or get invited to weddings or baptisms, but he knew almost everyone brought into the station in cuffs on a first name basis.

“Is that coffee fresh?” he asked. Anni nodded, and found herself handing the cup she’d just poured to him.

“You forget about that meeting this morning?” the sergeant asked.

“What meeting?” Slovo slurped from the cup.

“Jesus. You trying to get yourself fired?”

“Oh, *that* meeting. Don’t worry, I talked to a union rep. It’s

under control. Those for me?" He plucked the pages from the sergeant's hand and scanned them.

"Listen, Slovo—"

"I'll take this one." He snagged one of the slips with his teeth, handed the other one back, then stuffed the slip he'd selected into his pocket, already heading for the door.

"Hang on. Where're you at with that ag assault?"

"Working on it."

"That ASA called again. What am I supposed to tell him, your alarm didn't go off?"

"Tell him I got a fresh body over on . . ." He pulled the crumpled paper out of his pocket and squinted at it. "Ayers Avenue." He shouldered his way out, raising the cup to Anni in a toast.

"Asshole," the sergeant muttered as he handed her the other piece of paper. "Okay, this one's yours: a missing kid at the Taste. Don't give me that look."

"Why does he get to pick his assignments?"

"Seniority. Also, he doesn't work on anything with kids."

"I didn't know we had a choice."

"He already did his share. Besides, if you mislaid your kid at the park, would you want a guy like that to respond? They already got enough trauma. Talk to this family, okay? They're nice people from the North Shore, you speak their language. Hell, by the time you get there it'll probably be over."

But it wasn't. All these years later, it still wasn't.

As Shirley went through the file with her, page by page, things came back to Anni that she hadn't thought about in years—the pervasive smell of popcorn and fried food, overlaid by the rotten-fish scent of Lake Michigan, the over-cheery voice of some official who kept scanning the crowd anxiously, on the watch for nosy reporters, the fact that Danny's mother stumbled and nearly fell soon after Anni had arrived. Joyce Truscott looked drawn and pale, her forehead beaded with sweat. A migraine, she said as Anni took her arms and helped her sit down on the grass. Joyce said she had them often, but she'd left her pills at home. She didn't look much better after they got her home, hunched on the couch, her hands clenched together as if in prayer, pressed against her mouth.

There's a quantum quality to time when a child goes missing, Anni thought, turning the pages of the file. In a crowd as large as the one in Grant Park that day, kids disappear—then reappear seconds later. Lines of sight are constantly interrupted by the movement of the crowds, and parents feel a series of small jolts as they look around; oh *there* you are. That's one state, a fizzy, bubbling undercurrent of anxiety roused and resolved minute by minute. Police get a report of a missing child, and before they know it, a parent is scolding and hugging their kid.

Then there's the other state, the one when it becomes clear: *no, this is serious*. There's nothing in between. It's not a gradual realization, it's an abrupt leap from normal, everyday reality to something entirely different.

She could still feel the moment when it all shifted. The two uniformed officers who called it in kept telling Anni the kid was bound to turn up. They had dozens of these, *hundreds*, every summer. You put two, three million people in the park over the course of a week, it's gotta happen, right? Trying to decide what to do, she tuned them out, shut out the noise and heat for a moment to think. And something—was it when his mother's eyes met hers for just a second before she closed them, wincing in pain? Maybe it was just the answer to some calculation going on subconsciously, adding up the facts they had. He was too young, it had been too long. They had to assume the worst and get a comprehensive search underway, right now.

She'd had challenging moments in her short career, but she'd never had to organize the big-picture response this situation required. After that moment of stillness when everything seemed muffled and far away and her task suddenly loomed huge and urgent, she took a deep breath and stepped into the new role. First, she confirmed with Joyce Truscott the accuracy of the description the officers had already put out in a BOLO, told a park official that she needed a place they could use as a command center, with access to a computer, printer, and photocopier, and called her superior officer. Within the first fifteen minutes, she had drawn up and distributed a standard questionnaire officers could use to screen potential witnesses and had dispatched officers to collect any recordings they could get from surveillance cameras at businesses on Michigan Avenue. Within a half hour, the

district commander had ordered additional officers to assist, the head of patrol had begun evaluating staffing requirements for a wider search, and four more detectives arrived to conduct interviews with potential witnesses. A media relations staffer was appointed to liaise with the press and a community relations team geared up to handle volunteers and communicate with child advocacy organizations. An experienced detective nearing retirement was appointed support coordinator, tracking and organizing everything that came in. They would need to capture and process information as quickly as possible so that they could cross-check and filter out anything significant.

In that first hour, there were flickering moments when Anni was certain she'd made a mistake, that Danny was just out of sight somewhere in the crowd and everyone would think she was an idiot for making such a big production out of it. But those sparks of doubt never lasted long and grew less and less frequent. By the time she left the park with another detective, taking Joyce and her daughter home to Evanston where they would try to learn everything they could about the family and its inner dynamics as quickly as possible, she knew in the pit of her stomach that Danny had been abducted. Whether it was the impulsive move of a nutcase or something more organized and sinister they wouldn't know until they picked up some leads or got a ransom demand. But there was no longer any question that he hadn't simply wandered off.

Though the investigation involved hundreds of officers

and coordination with law enforcement in surrounding counties, state troopers, and a team from the local field office of the FBI, Anni remained officially the officer in charge of the investigation. She sensed some grumbling about it, questions about her competence, skepticism that she'd been advanced too quickly to a detective assignment because cute young women with brown skin and connections had an advantage over experienced cops, though nobody said it to her face. When she raised it with Jim Tilquist, a close friend who had spent years as an Area 4 detective before joining the FBI, he told her not to worry, that if anyone doubted her capability, her performance was proving them wrong. It was all about teamwork and organization, and she was doing a fine job keeping all the pieces together.

But as weeks passed without any leads that held up, the task force was gradually dismantled. Multi-agency meetings grew less and less frequent until they stopped altogether, and eventually the paperwork from active cases took the place of the log and lead sheets for the Danny Truscott investigation. Every month she ran checks for similar incidents in other jurisdictions, but nothing ever led anywhere.

By the time they reached the end of the files, Anni felt oddly reassured. There were signs throughout the record that she was new to the work. Her paperwork was obsessively correct and much too detailed, but she couldn't see any obvious angle she had failed to pursue. It turned out that Feliks Król had been questioned. Officers from every beat in four

districts and parts of two more had conducted a thorough door-to-door and of them had recorded a short conversation with “Felix Crow,” church custodian.

“We talked to the officer,” Shirley said, tapping on his name. “He didn’t remember screening Król. Not surprising when you talk to that many people over the course of a few days.”

“I’m amazed he got anything out of him. From what I’ve heard, the guy was barely verbal. Did you turn up any other police contact?”

“Cited for trespassing twice, both times for looking through trash bins on private property. Charges dismissed when the officer didn’t show up at court.”

“Any other charges?”

“Nothing that stuck. He got in a dispute once with a shop owner, agreed to stay off the premises. Got questioned a few times about burglaries in the neighborhood, but nobody seriously suspected him of anything worse than being mentally defective and odd.”

“I always thought he was harmless.”

“Everyone did. Maybe he was. He could have just found Danny’s clothes in a trash can, like all that other junk he carried home.”

“But those pictures—”

“Yeah. The pictures.” They fell silent for a moment.

“Was Sidlo able to tell you where exactly the clothes had been in that room?” Anni asked.

"We have a pretty good idea." Shirley smiled blandly, a door being closed, gently but firmly.

Anni took the hint. Not your business. "You said Joyce, the mother—she's not cooperating?"

"She's answering our questions, barely, but she's not going out of her way to volunteer anything. She might if you talked to her."

"You want me to?"

"I want to find out what happened to Danny."

The boisterous arrival of a trio of customers gave Anni a moment to think. As the noisy crew focused on choosing their options from the glass pastry case she said, "Okay, look: Sidlo still wants me to work for him, and I need the money."

"So we might have some alignment of interests on this."

"Maybe. I'm still pissed off about the way he moved those clothes, just to hook me into this. But I could tell him I'll take the job on the condition that everything we find out goes straight to you. That I won't participate in anything that gets in your way. That you and Franklin are calling the shots on this investigation, not him."

"Sounds like a plan to me."

It sounded all wrong to Anni. She took client confidentiality seriously. She'd never taken a job with strings like these attached, but then she'd never imagined she'd agree to work for Sidlo after what he did. "Not sure he'll go for it."

"Can't hurt. That woman's tight-lipped. If you could get her to open up, it might help."

"You think Franklin will be okay with this?"

She waved her hand dismissively. "You know how guys are. He can be a little territorial, but he'll come around, don't worry. We all want the same thing, right?" She looked at Anni until she nodded.

Anni helped her put the files back in order and slipped them into Shirley's tote bag as she held it open. "So, guess I'll be in touch."

Shirley was hunting for car keys in her purse. "Okie doke," she said, abstractedly, then looked up, giving Anni a wide smile. "Let me know how it goes with the Little Professor."

“*Awesome!*” Ben Sidlo slapped the arms of his chair. “I can’t wait to tell everyone. Everyone on the team,” he backtracked, noticing Anni’s reaction.

His office in the fine arts building of Stony Cliff College had the usual professorial trappings: a paper-strewn desk, dented filing cabinet, and a wall of built-in shelves filled with books jammed into every available space. The wall behind him was covered with postcards, yellowed newspaper clippings, a poster for the upcoming spring student art show, and a glossy color printout of one of Feliks Król’s paintings showing three girls running across a field of flowers under threatening clouds and jagged bursts of lightning. There was also a copy of the photo she’d seen before, Król smoking a pipe, staring fixedly to one side with eyes that now seemed to have something mad and dangerous in them.

“You understand my conditions, though, right?” she asked him.

“Sure. It’s not like I don’t want to help the police solve this case.”

“By moving evidence?”

He winced. “That was stupid. I get that, now.”

“It was wrong. Also, I don’t want to screw things up for the investigation, and that means not letting people know I’m involved.”

He started to nod, then frowned in thought. “Oh, wait. Our funders will need to know who we’re hiring. I’ll need a C.V. for the record.”

“My resume? That’s fine. I just don’t want my name broadcast.”

“I’m not going to issue a press release about it, if that’s what you mean.”

“I don’t want it on Twitter, I don’t want it on Facebook, I don’t want it on any website. I don’t want you bringing it up when you talk to a reporter.” He nodded, but she sensed he was not taking her seriously, like a kid crossing his fingers behind his back. “I know you think this would make a juicy story, but if my involvement leaks to the press, I’m outta here.”

“Okay, okay. Got it.” He paused, frowning to himself. “Look, can I ask you something? Is this always such a big deal with you, this privacy thing? Because it’s kind of too late. I Googled you. You’re all over the place.”

“Which is exactly why I don’t want people talking about the fact that the person who originally worked on Danny’s disappearance is now working on this project. The press

would make a big thing out of it, and that family's been through enough."

He nodded. "It wouldn't be in my interest, either. Anything that smacks of tabloid journalism would distract everyone from why Feliks Król's work is so important."

She rolled her eyes.

"For real. Look, it's hard enough to get people to take outsider art seriously. They think of whirligigs and folksy paintings of cows or weird religious garden sculptures made by eccentrics. Antiques Freakshow. Thing is, Król was an amazing artist. His use of color, his natural feel for composition, the way his mix of Christian iconography, photojournalism and advertising comes together . . ."

He pulled some prints from a stack of papers and spread them across his desk. "Look at this. Look at how he sets up this incredible tension, here, with this open space in the center and the crowded, claustrophobic detail there in the background, like it's a wave of feverish complexity about to break over this still, peaceful scene." He pulled another print over and his hands flashed across the table as he sketched out what he saw. He seemed electrified, animated by passion. She could see for the first time why he was a popular teacher.

"And this one, this pastoral scene that seems so peaceful, so innocent, with all the perspective flattened out and everything outlined so definitely, with these flowers and insects out of scale with the children? See that? It's like a children's book. And then off in the distance, in that corner, the way he builds up layers of darker colors and everything gets indistinct. He's

able to suggest something that you can't put your finger on, just these shapes, these vague and threatening . . ." He waved his hands, finally out of words. "It's just so *great!* He was *so good* at taking cheap paint and dime store notebooks and . . . doing this. This magical stuff."

He stared at the prints, lost in thought for a moment, before coming back to himself. He gathered them up and blinked at her. "Does that make sense?"

"Kind of. I mean, I can see why you find it interesting."

"But you still think it's disturbing." She shrugged. "Hah! That's because it is. Great art is disturbing. That's what it's for, to shake us out of our comfortable, narrow little worlds."

"Yeah, I know, *épater la bourgeoisie* and all that." His eyebrows arched in surprise. "But it's not helpful right now. Since you talked to that radio reporter, since they put some of this stuff online, the police have been getting calls, completely useless tips. People who were used to seeing Król around the neighborhood are wondering if they ignored danger signals."

"I'm sure. It's troubling to find out a man you always thought was a simpleton was capable of art like this. And its frank sexuality is disquieting. Maybe he really . . . well, who knows? This is why we need you."

"To see if I can uncover some dirt? Tie him to a crime that will get attention?"

"No." He put his face in his hands for a moment. "That's not it. We need your help so we can see who he really was, get past the crazy old guy with strange eyes. We need background, context. What matters is his art, not his biography,

but to understand his art, we need to know who he was." He looked at her until she nodded. "So, are we good?"

"So long as you're willing to cooperate fully with the investigation and withhold information from the public if that's what the police want."

"Fantastic. I'm really looking forward to working with you on this. How do we proceed?"

"I brought another contract and a tax form. I plugged in the figures you mentioned. Part time, no benefits, the stipend you mentioned. I put two years, the duration of your grant, but there's a clause that either of us can back out with a month's notice. If we need to write this up differently—"

"No, this is great." He took the papers she had brought with her and scrabbled for a pen.

She countersigned and tucked her copy into her bag. "Okay, next steps. Not sure what I can get out of public records. Sounds as if he might have left less of a paper trail than most people, but I'll see what I can find. I'll interview people who might have known him. And I need to look through his belongings. I realize you have some concerns about that."

"The police are pretty impatient." He pulled a keyboard over and tapped a few keys. "They would prefer to go through it like bulldozers, but that would be a disaster. The room itself is one of Król's creations. His selection of materials, the way he assembled things, the order he chose to impose on it, it has a sculptural quality. We're creating a 3-D knowledge base that can be explored all kinds of ways if we do it

right. I have a couple of grad students working on it, documenting everything.”

He turned the monitor so that she could see. “It’s like an archaeological dig, layers and layers of information to catalog. As we dig deeper into these piles, we’re going back in time, so the placement of each object can tell us something about historical context. We’ve found paintings and drawings among the accumulated stuff, drafts of later work, cartoon sketches of larger works, all in the context of whatever was inspiring him at the moment of creation.”

“How far have you gotten?”

“This area here.” He dragged his mouse over a section of the model. “We’re nearly done with this part.”

“But . . . that’s nothing.”

“We’ve also made a preliminary examination of this area.” He moved his mouse to square off a section. “The police insisted. That’s where the, uh, where the clothing was originally found. They searched through it, but under my supervision. It still needs to be accessioned and documented properly.”

“How long is this process of yours going to take?”

“Don’t worry about that. If we don’t finish in two years, we can get another grant. Let me show you what the metadata looks like.” He brought up a spreadsheet that listed items. *Chicago Tribune, Metro Section dated June 15, 2004. Flyer advertising body shop on Chicago Ave, undated. X Men Comic Book, Alpha Flight Vol. 3, issue 2, 2004.* “That’s one stack. Over three hundred entries.”

Years, she thought. It could be years before they'd know for sure if there was anything in that room that would help them find out what happened to Danny.

"I just had a paper accepted for a conference on how we're using this software," he went on. "Being able to mine the data will give us so many novel approaches to studying his work and its influences. Not that the college is providing funding. They don't realize what a coup this is."

He leaned back in his chair, running his fingers through his hair in exasperation. "And our so-called communications office? Basically it's one guy, and he's clueless. He can't keep up with requests from the media, much less pitch stories to the right places – and he can't even write! I spent hours with him, explaining it all, and the press release he wrote was awful. I found an intern who's going to handle social media, but we need someone with connections to major outlets."

"You have a budget for that?"

"Why? Are you interested?"

"I'm not a writer, but I know someone who is. Not sure if he's free right now."

"We can probably work something out. Who is it?"

"A journalist who's been nominated for a Pulitzer more than once. PR isn't his thing, but if you give him access to the materials and let him in on your thoughts about the guy, he could pitch an article for a national outlet."

"Fabulous."

"On the condition I'm not named in any stories."

"Sure."

“Because that’s our deal, right? I’m serious about this. He can’t bring me into it.”

“Totally.”

She made a mental note to get the same agreement from Az Abkerian before she hooked him up with Sidlo. She felt bad for the old reporter, but wasn’t going to let him in on the opportunity without first extracting promises. “Those notebooks that were lying on the table,” she said. “The ones with the newspaper clippings. Is there any chance I could see them?”

“Ah, the notebooks. We’ve uncovered twenty of them so far and have been working madly to digitize them. It’s tricky work. We couldn’t afford a high-end commercial scanner, but I know some techies and one of them rigged up an archival scanner with decent resolution. We’re using this software—”

“How many have you scanned?” she interrupted.

“Six. No, seven. We just finished the image files on eighth one. It has been an extraordinary effort, getting so many completed this quickly. The quality has to be top notch. Of course, the OCR is a whole ‘nother problem. We won’t get to that until—”

“Can I get copies of what you’ve got so far?”

He took a breath, opened his mouth to speak, then checked himself. “Jesus, I almost forgot. I have something for you to sign.” He hunted for a file on his computer, then printed out four sheets of paper. He gathered them up, tapped them straight and handed them to her.

“What’s this?”

“A nondisclosure agreement. Everyone working on this project signs it.”

She scanned the first page. “I can’t sign this.”

His face fell. “But—”

“I already explained, I need to be able to share information with the police.”

“Oh, *that’s* okay. It’s just . . . there’s so much interest in Król already, I need to make sure we control the messaging.”

“If I can amend this thing, I’ll sign.”

“Sure. Whatever.”

She worked through the wordy legal document, boiler-plate language that she suspected he’d found online, and added several variations of “except when cooperating with law enforcement in a criminal investigation” where it needed to be inserted, crossing through language she didn’t like. As she worked, someone coughed behind her. “Uh, Professor? I got an appointment?”

Sidlo looked at the gangly boy with a backpack over one shoulder and smacked his forehead. “Jason, sorry! Look, can you come back in ten minutes?”

“I have class.”

“Fine. Send me an email, we’ll reschedule.”

“But I need your recommendation for study abroad, and it’s due today, so—”

“Ah, shit.” Sidlo checked his phone. “Give us five minutes?” After the kid reluctantly slouched away, he rubbed his face with both hands. “Sorry. So typical of this place. I’m trying

to get this project off the ground while dealing with thirty advisees and teaching a full load. I tried to get a couple of course releases, even just one, but no, that's out of the question. You show me anyone else in this department, on this campus, whose working on something as significant as—"

She cut him off, handing him the amended agreement. "Look, you're busy, so if I could just get access to those scanned notebooks, I'll get out of your hair."

"Right. I can burn you a copy if you don't mind waiting. It'll take a while, though. They're huge files."

"Are you storing all this stuff on a shared server? If you can set me up with a password, you won't have to make copies. I can even save my notes there."

"Fabulous idea. I'll talk to my IT guy." He got a puzzled look on his face. "You know, I'm kind of surprised how quickly you pick up on this stuff."

"What stuff?"

He waved vaguely. "*Épater la bourgeoisie*? Those police officers, I'm sure they're good at their jobs, but they can't understand Król's art. I didn't expect . . . I thought you'd be more . . ." He paused, searching for the right word. Before he found it she took her bag and left.

She detoured across campus to the social sciences center, a 1950s modernist box where her friend Nancy Tilquist had an office. As a teen, Anni was a babysitter for Nancy's children and introduced her to the man she later married. Jim Tilquist, the cop who had mentored Anni into a law enforce-

ment career. Now Nancy was a middle-aged widow raising three girls on her own, the closest thing Anni and her brother had to an extended family.

Nancy was striding down the hall, carrying an armful of books and papers. "What brings you to campus?"

"A job. On your way to class?" Anni grabbed three books that were threatening to slide off the pile and walked with her.

"I'm handing back essays, so there will much wailing and gnashing of teeth. What's the job?"

"Ben Sidlo wants me to do some digging on that outsider artist he's discovered."

"The fellow he can't stop talking about." Nancy frowned in thought. "There was something on the radio the other day, about clothing found in his room. I wondered if it was that case you—"

"Yeah. Which makes it complicated."

"Extraordinary coincidence."

"It wasn't a coincidence. Sidlo knew I had been involved in that case, then moved things around so that when he called me in, I'd see the clothes and make the connection between Danny Truscott and his artist."

Nancy stopped short and gaped. "He didn't."

"He did. I was furious. I wasn't going to take this job, but the police seem to think it won't hurt, and I could use the money. How well do you know Sidlo?"

"Not well. Sophie's taken a couple of classes with him,

though. Come to dinner so she can give you the inside scoop. And bring that man of yours. How about this Saturday?"

"Sounds good, if we can get our schedules synced. He's pretty tied up these days."

"I've heard that before."

They'd reached the classroom. Nancy thumped her papers down. "Right then. See you Saturday. And tell Dugan I'll be very disappointed if he doesn't show."

As Anni left the building, she pulled her phone out of her bag. She didn't want to make the call, but she knew she had to, and putting it off would only make it harder.

She sat on a wall outside the social sciences center and looked up the number. It hadn't changed, the sequence instantly familiar, and so was the Evanston address. She had expected the Truscotts to move up the shore and closer to the lake as Brian's public profile and personal wealth grew, but they still lived in the house that she'd seen for the first time the day Danny disappeared. The phone rang four times, five. Given the amount of attention the case was getting in the media, they were no doubt screening calls. She was trying to decide how to word a message when someone finally picked up.

"Hello?" Joyce Truscott's low voice was hesitant.

"Oh, hi. It's Anni Koskinen. Shirley McGrath suggested that I get in touch."

“Oh, Anni. Sorry, I thought it was another reporter calling.” A wave of relief seemed to flow through the words. “I was all set to hang up.” Her words had just a hint of a soft drawl, the remnant of her childhood home in the southern end of the state.

“I’m sorry about . . . I mean, I know this whole thing must be difficult.”

“It’s been such a long time. Would you like to come over?”

“Do you mean now?”

“You’re probably busy. I don’t know what I’m thinking.”

“No, this is perfect. As it happens, I’m at Stoney Cliff College, not that far away.”

“I’ll put the kettle on when you get here. We can have a nice cup of tea. Or coffee if you’d rather. I usually have tea in the afternoon, but—”

Anni wondered what made Joyce apologetic about nearly every word she uttered. Was it living with Brian Truscott, that relentless extrovert? “A cup of tea sounds great. See you soon.”

As reluctant as she had been to make that call, to confront the newly-awakened grief of a woman whose child had been missing all these years, she was surprised at how easy it was to talk to Joyce. It had always been easy. Though Joyce seemed profoundly shy and conversations tended to trickle away, it was an undemanding silence. In some ways it reminded Anni of hanging out with her brother Martin. He could become wildly distraught if his routine was disrupted or if he was confronted with people he didn’t know, but whenever it was

just them, she always found his non-verbal companionship relaxing in comparison with people like Ben Sidlo, who loved his own voice and polished every social exchange like a mirror so he could enjoy his own reflection.

It was odd, driving along the quiet, tree-lined residential block where the houses were large but not ostentatious like the ones nearer the shore. They were four-square frame houses with big front porches, built in the late nineteenth century for people with aspirations, lots of children, and faith in the healing powers of fresh air away from the sooty city. It has been a long time since she'd made the trip, but the route felt strangely familiar, as if nothing had changed since Danny had vanished. A little boy who would be thirteen now. She still pictured him as the solemn three-year-old on the posters.

Joyce welcomed Anni in with a flicker of a smile, but her eyes looked tired, with dark circles smudged under them. Her once-dark hair was growing silver, but it was still long and thick, massed around a face that was still just shy of fifty but looked older. She was barefoot, in jeans and a shapeless sweater that didn't flatter her, but when Anni reached down to add her boots to the collection of shoes on a mat near the door, Joyce shook her head. "No need."

"But your floors."

She brushed it away with a gesture. Somehow that dismissive wave seemed to include the whole house, the neighborhood, maybe the entire world. Unimportant.

She still had the same sturdy gait, Anni noticed as she followed her into the kitchen, a solid way of planting her bare

feet on the polished hardwood floors that seemed so much more decisive than her awkwardly introverted conversational style. “How have you been?” she asked Anni, nodding toward a chair. “It’s been a while since you started your new career. Two years?”

“Just about.” Anni sat, wondering whether anyone had bothered to check in with the Truscotts since she had left the job. Probably not.

“How do you like it?”

“It’s not what I had planned to do with my life, but it’s working out. In fact, I just came from a meeting—”

“Would you like herb tea? Or I have some Assam that I get at an Indian grocery,” Joyce interrupted. “Brews up nice and strong.”

“That sounds good, thanks.”

She filled a kettle and readied a teapot. Anni took a chair, remembering the room, a pleasant old-fashioned kitchen with sunflower yellow walls, Delft tiles over the sink. The old pine table in the center of the room looked as if it had spent decades of service, and there was a clutter of things on the counter – a crumpled dish towel, some groceries that hadn’t been put away, unopened mail. The living room they’d passed through had looked sterile, as if it was ready to be photographed for a magazine spread. The kitchen felt as if someone actually lived there.

“I wasn’t surprised when you told me you were leaving the police force,” she said, reaching for cups and saucers. “I

thought you might join a nonprofit or become a social justice lawyer, like that woman you work with, Thea Adelman.”

“We’re not that much alike, actually.”

“Really? You seem to care about the same things. I always wondered how you got along with police culture, what attracted you to it.”

“I had a close friend who was a cop. I wanted to be like him.”

She winced. “Sorry. I didn’t mean . . . That sounded . . .”

“No, it’s fine. Honestly, I never did get along with it. It just took a while to figure it out.”

“You were always honest with me. And you kept in touch. That meant a lot. Are you hungry? I have some of those Danish butter cookies somewhere.”

“No. I’m fine.”

She spread her hands out and studied them. “How’s your brother?”

“Doing well.”

“Still working at the college?”

“Yes, same job, same apartment. Good thing he doesn’t like change; there isn’t much of it in his life.”

“You must have been visiting him.”

“Actually, I had a meeting there. Listen, this is why I need to talk to you. I’m not sure how you’ll feel about it, but I’m going to do some background research for Ben Sildo, the art historian who found Danny’s things.” Joyce turned and glanced at the stove, as if she had just thought of something

she needed to do, but Anni carried on. "He got a grant to do a project about this artist. The one who . . ."

"Had Danny's things in that room," Joyce said.

"They don't know much about this guy, this weird artist, so . . . I'm not sure how you feel about me being involved in this. I'm going to be working for a man who's probably going to gain a lot of publicity because of what he found. That strange art he's so excited about."

Joyce took a breath and sat straighter. "Tell me about him."

"He's young, ambitious. Kind of into himself."

"I meant the artist." Joyce smiled bleakly. "The strange artist."

"Oh. Feliks Król." Anni summarized what she little she knew about him as Joyce listened intently.

"I saw his paintings on the WBEZ website," she said. "They're sad and scary, like the dream world of a disturbed child. What do you think happened?"

"No idea. That's something the police will be—"

"They don't know anything." She frowned and traced the wood grain in the table with a fingertip. "You've seen that room."

"I was in it once, briefly."

"You saw Danny's . . ." She groped for a moment.

"The shirt that Cassie helped him decorate on his birthday, and the sandals."

"His dinosaur sandals." Her smile flickered again, and she pressed her eyes shut for a moment, then took a deep breath. "Why do children like dinosaurs so much? And trucks."

Things that are big and dangerous. He couldn't get enough of them. You know, I'd gotten used to the fact that we might never know what happened." She frowned at a spot in front of her, reached out to brush away an invisible crumb. "It took years, but I came to terms with it. The open-endedness of it." They sat in silence for a minute. Shadows washed across the room as trees outside stirred in a breeze.

"He's dead," she finally said. "I'm sure of it."

"We don't know—"

"I do. I've known for years. It sounds silly, but it came to me a week after the park, after he disappeared. I woke up that morning and I knew."

"There's no evidence to suggest one thing or the other."

"I don't need evidence. I just know. Brian won't accept it, he won't even let me say it, but it's true. You would have found him if he were still alive. Someone would have found him."

"Not necessarily," Anni said, thinking *she's right*. He's gone. Bones in a shallow grave. Remains buried in silt at the bottom of a pond. Bits of charred rubble long ago absorbed by the earth.

"I realize it sounds ridiculous. As if mothers have psychic powers. But one day I was terrified for what might be happening to him, and the next, soon's I woke up, I knew it was over. That I didn't have to worry anymore. It was strange to feel relieved. Wrong, especially when everyone told us to be strong, to have faith, my husband most of all. He thinks anything less is betrayal, but that's more about him than anything

else. A test of his strength. I still miss Danny, of course." She smiled to herself. "Those dinosaur sandals. He would have worn them to bed if I'd let him."

Anni didn't have anything to say. Somewhere a clock ticked faintly, a patient, steady rhythm. Joyce sat in a trance until the kettle began to sing. She filled the pot, set it on the table, got cups and saucers, spoons and a sugar bowl. "So, you're going to help this art historian. What's his name again?"

"Ben Sidlo."

"You'll tell me if you find anything out. If it turns out this artist had anything to do with it."

"Yes, of course."

"Even if you just think something might be . . . if you get a hunch. An idea. It's not that I'm . . ." She frowned, her mouth tight. "I'm at peace," she said as if to persuade herself. "I just don't want to see things in the news or hear people talk about it and not know what happened to him. How it happened. The police aren't any use, and my husband—" she shook her head. "You used to call me. I just want . . . that again. To know where things stand."

"I'm sorry you have to go through this again."

She nodded, then smiled to herself. "Brian's loving it, being in the spotlight. He's like a little boy, sometimes, so eager for attention." She spoke without bitterness.

"How's Cassie handling it?"

"She's not happy, but that's nothing new."

"She's what, nineteen now? Finished with high school?"

"So you would think." She smiled wryly. "She dropped out in her junior year. She's been working as a seamstress, repairing vintage clothing. Plus she's apprenticed to a tattoo artist, learning the trade. I think that's mainly to impress her father. He hates needles. We don't see much of her these days. She shares a house with some people in the city."

"How's Philip doing?"

"He still lives in Arizona." Joyce filled their cups before getting up to prow through the cupboards. "I have some of those Danish cookies somewhere. It's a blue tin." She opened and closed a few more cupboards before she sat down again and picked up her cup. "They're not that good, anyway. Brian found a school for Philip down there."

"I remember."

"It wasn't a good fit for him. His seizures got worse. He got pneumonia twice. Then there was an accident. We still don't know exactly what happened, but he had a traumatic brain injury that wasn't diagnosed for quite a while."

"I'm so sorry."

"It's okay now. He's in a residential program outside of Tucson. Well, that's what they call it. It's a nursing home, really. They do a good job caring for him. They ought to; it costs more than Harvard." She laughed ruefully. "I visit every few months, but he doesn't seem to recognize me anymore. I don't think he's unhappy, though."

Anni's eyes were burning suddenly, her nose stopped up and aching. "I don't know what to say."

"Oh, Anni. I didn't mean—" She reached over and touched

Anni's arm lightly with her fingertips, so gently she barely felt it. "Don't feel bad. I appreciate you asking about him. Hardly anyone does."

She drank her tea and refilled her cup, while Anni rubbed her nose with a paper napkin, feeling like a fool.

"I wish I could tell the police something useful," Joyce said, "but I'd never heard of Feliks Król. They showed me a picture of him. Such strange eyes. I don't recall seeing anyone like that in the park, and he would have stood out." She stared straight ahead, thinking, a crease denting her forehead. "Old, peculiar, in raggedy clothes. I just remember families and tourists. People in town for conventions wearing name tags. If I'd seen someone like him I would have noticed, don't you think? I would have told you. Someone would have."

"We talked to him. An officer did, didn't note anything unusual. There's a good chance Król simply found the clothing somewhere and took it home with him. Did you know anyone who lived on the West Side back then? Or maybe worked there?"

She stirred her tea and watched the swirls settle down. "No. Nobody."

"The place where he lived, it's near Wicker Park."

"That's a trendy area, isn't it? Cassie has friends who live there."

"What about anyone who might have worked in that area, or driven on Division or Milwaukee to get to their home or work?" Joyce shrugged. "Maybe someone your husband worked with?"

"We never talk about his work. Well, he talks, but I don't really listen anymore. I wish I could be more helpful."

"Don't worry about it. Chances are there is no connection between Król and whoever took Danny."

"You'll be checking into it, though."

"Not exactly. Ben Sidlo has hired me to do learn what I can about Król. The police are the ones who will be investigating any connection he might have had with Danny."

Joyce frowned slightly, disappointed but too polite to say so.

"Look, I've known Shirley McGrath for a long time," Anni said. "She's a good cop. I don't know Harold Franklin personally, but he seems solid, and from what I've heard the pair of them clear a lot of cases. I'll be sharing anything I learn about Król with them."

"And you'll let me know?"

"Of course."

"Brian wants to boost the reward up to half a million dollars."

"Shit." It slipped out before Anni could stop it. "Sorry, I didn't mean—"

"No, I know. The police are trying to talk him out of it. I guess when there's that much money, all kinds of scammers come out of the woodwork, but he says it will make it easier to spread the word."

"It won't help at all. It will waste police time, and the word's spreading just fine without it."

"We don't have that kind of money, anyway. He just wants

to feel like he's doing something, the bigger the better. It's hard on him. He's so used to being in charge, making things happen. You'll let me know about anything that turns up, won't you? Even random ideas, theories. Things that would waste police time." She gave Anni a crooked smile. "I have plenty of time. I just want to know what you're thinking. What you learn about that man. What made him draw those pictures."

"Sure." Anni took out a card. "Any time you want to talk, feel free to contact me."

Joyce looked at the card intently, as if committing it to memory, then set it on the table in front of her, straightening it fastidiously before picking up her teacup. "So, how've you're been? Do you still live in Humboldt Park? You'd bought a house there, I seem to remember."

They chatted for another fifteen minutes, an oddly comfortable conversation, and then Anni took her leave.

The next morning, Anni took a cup of coffee and her computer to the couch to scan the headlines and check her email. Included among her messages was a chipper note from Ben Sidlo that provided instructions for creating a password for the secure server where all the research material for the Feliks Król project was being stored. She set up an account, logged in, and poked around. The eight notebooks that had been scanned were accompanied by one-page descriptions that read like copy for an art exhibit catalog, full of words like “liminal” and “transgressive.” She opened one of them at random and clicked through a few pages before deciding it was too early in the morning for Król’s disturbing vision of the world, full of cruelty and religion. Instead, she called Az Abkerian. She got his voicemail, so simply told him she might have a story for him. She spent an hour checking public records databases, finding a few scant traces of her subject, including a phone number for Pat O’Hara, the elderly

boarder who had moved out of the house on Wolcott Avenue into senior housing. He seemed not just willing but eager to share with her what he knew.

After inviting her into his tiny overheated studio apartment, the old man waved her to a chair before he hustled into a kitchen nook to fill mugs with coffee. A plate of Oreos had already been set out on a coffee table. "The police were already here," he said proudly, easing himself into a well-worn recliner. "Two detectives. A woman and a colored guy, reminded me of that actor, what's his name? You know the one, he was in that movie . . ." He squinted at her, then waved it away. "Aw, hell, can't remember nothing these days. Getting old is for suckers. You're a detective, you said?"

"A private investigator."

She handed him one of her cards, and he took it curiously, setting his mug down and rummaging through the clutter on the table beside him for a pair of glasses. He held the card out at arm's length to read it. "What do you know," he muttered to himself, before setting it aside.

"As you probably heard, the police got interested in Feliks Król because he happened to have some clothing in his room that belonged to a child who went missing ten years ago. I'm working for an art professor who's interest is in Król's work. Paintings Feliks made."

"You got to be kidding me. Feliks? Never would have guessed."

"This professor wants to know more about Król's life, but he's busy teaching, so he hired me to interview anyone who

knew him. I'm probably going to ask the same questions those detectives asked."

"Okay by me." He folded the glasses and tucked them into his shirt pocket. "Help yourself to them cookies."

She took one to be polite, and took a cautious nibble. She had spent a lot of time interviewing elderly people. Often they were the only ones at home, the only ones paying attention when something went down on the street outside. More often than not, they provided refreshments, but thanks to poor eyesight and dulled taste buds, the food could be stale and sometimes the dishes weren't clean. Fortunately, these cookies were fresh and the china was spotless.

"Feliks Król left a room jam-packed with stuff," she said.

"He was such a packrat. I saw a television show about that. Hoarding, they call it. Made me wonder about Feliks."

"He also left behind paintings and a lot of stories he wrote, stories he illustrated."

"No kidding? He used to buy notebooks at the Walgreens, the kind kids use at school. Must have written thousands of pages. He'd sit for hours, scribbling away."

"Did he show you his work?"

"Nope. Never. Not like my neighbor across the hall, here. That jackass wrote his memoirs and his grandson got them printed up. He keeps trying to sell those books of his to everybody. Like living across from a used car lot. Feliks wasn't like that. I only knew about it 'cause he'd sit on the back porch when it was hot, writing in them notebooks of

his. I kidded him, called him Shakespeare. He didn't mind. We got along fine."

"When did you first meet Feliks?"

"Would have been, oh, let's see. Around the time Ronald Reagan got elected. I had a nice apartment up in Andersonville, but the building got sold and I couldn't afford to live there no more, so I got a room at Mrs. P's instead. That's what we called her, Mrs. P. Her actual name was . . . it was . . ." He picked at his shirt, frowning.

"Peterson," she said.

"That was it. Peterson. *Doris* Peterson!" He slapped his knee, happy to have that hole in his memory plugged. "Mrs. P, she lost her husband in Korea, got a carpenter to throw up some walls so she could take in boarders. Feliks was already living there when I moved in. Everybody told me he was a dope. Simple-minded. Simple like a fox."

"He was smart?"

"He knew what was going on. Just didn't like to talk much, and he didn't care what people thought of him. Stubborn, too, always liked to have his own way. What a character."

"What do you know about his background?"

"He was born in Chicago, not far from the boarding house. He pointed it out to me, one of them little brick three-flats on Paulina, a few blocks south of Division. He lived with his mom on the bottom floor, down below the sidewalk, you know how they are? Little paved spot out front, steps going up to the sidewalk. That part of town was mostly Polish back then. By the time I got there, it was different. Lot of Hispan-

ics. Lot of crime. Rougher than Andersonville, but I didn't have a choice."

"You think you could recognize the house Feliks was born in if you saw it again?"

"I might, but I don't get out much these days."

"How about I show you some pictures on my computer?"

He was dubious as she brought up Google Maps, found street level views of the block south of Division, and settled her computer in his lap, reaching over to nudge the cursor down the street.

"Tell me if you see the house."

He fumbled for his glasses and shook his head. "What'll they think of next?" He stared at the screen, frowning as the view proceeded south. "Where'd they get all those pictures?"

"They drove a car down the street with a camera on top."

"On Paulina?"

"On streets all over."

"What'd they do that for?" Before she could come up with an answer, he said "Wait, I think . . . can you back up?"

She did. "This side of the street?" She rotated the view.

"Quit that, you're making me dizzy. If you could just . . . hold it. That's the one." He waved a finger over the screen. "What do you know, just like it used to be. Only it was run down back then. Look how they fancied it up. Fellow who took over Mrs. P's place was full of big plans, too, though I don't know. He looked like a hippie to me, not a hard worker."

She took the laptop from him and saved a screenshot. "So that's where he grew up, huh?"

"Until he was six or seven, anyways." He took an Oreo and bit into it, then brushed crumbs off his chest. "His mom got sick, and since he didn't have a dad or relatives to take care of him, he ended up in an orphanage."

"Which one? Do you know?"

He frowned. "Wasn't that big one up in Rogers Park. I had a friend who grew up there, so I asked Feliks if that was it, and it wasn't. Must have been Catholic, though. The orphanages back then were all Catholic or Protestant, and Feliks was Catholic, for sure. Old fashioned about it, too. Never ate meat on Friday, went to church every day, rain or shine. Very devout."

"So I've heard. He worked at a church, didn't he?"

"For years. Never missed a day, not till Father Anthony got put out to pasture and the new guy pulled the plug on Feliks's job. Why the parish couldn't spare that little bit of money he made, I'll never know."

"That must have been upsetting for him, to lose his job."

O'Hara chuckled. "Not so much. He never cared about money. He just quit going to that church. Struck it right off his list. Plenty of others to go to."

"He didn't get angry?"

"Feliks wasn't the emotional type."

"What type was he, would you say?"

He scratched his chin, thinking. "He wasn't sociable like some of my neighbors here, jabbering about dumb stuff every

chance they get. I never knew anybody like him. He lived life his own way. Loved going to church, and he loved finding pretty things, stuff he'd pick up here and there. Loved children."

She kept her tone relaxed, though something in her chest tightened with his words. "I would have thought kids might have given him a hard time, considering people thought he was simple."

"Oh, they could be cruel, all right, the teenagers, especially. They get that attitude, you know. But he felt bad for the little ones who didn't have nobody looking after them, just like when he was a kid. Those orphanages weren't a bed of roses. Cold dorms, lousy food, lots of rules. Feliks and rules didn't get along. That's why he felt sorry for 'em. The neighborhood was a mess, back then. Lot of kids, even little ones, roaming around like stray cats. Feliks always kept an eye out for toys or whatnot when he went out trash picking. He'd leave 'em by the playground or on their front steps. Gave him a kick, watching 'em find his presents."

"Were there kids in the neighborhood that he got particularly close to?"

She'd tried to keep her tone neutral, but he bristled. "Those cops asked that, too, like Feliks was some kind of creep. You people have your minds in the gutter." He rapped the knuckles of both fists on his knees, angry and frustrated. "He was a decent Christian man who minded his own business. Didn't ever hurt nobody."

"I didn't mean to imply anything, I'm just trying to get a

sense of what he was like. In those notebooks of his, he wrote about children, children in trouble. Some of them were based on news stories. He saved clippings.”

For a minute she thought he was finished talking to her, looking away with his jaw tight, but he gave a low chuckle in spite of himself. “Clippings. I’d forgotten all about that. Kind of annoying. By the time you got down to breakfast he’d already been through the paper, cut big holes in it. Mrs. P told him not to, but he didn’t pay no attention. Like I said, he was stubborn. Did things his own way.”

“The stories he saved were all about children getting hurt.”

“It’s not like he had to use his imagination. You read the papers lately?” He shook his head. “There was a story the other day, made me sick to my stomach. It’s a terrible world, sometimes.”

“I know. I was a police officer for ten years.”

“Well, there you go.”

“Also, my brother and I grew up in foster care. It wasn’t like the old orphanages, but it wasn’t always great.”

“At least you had a brother. Feliks didn’t have nobody.”

“He had friends like you. I’m sure that meant a lot to him.”

“Maybe.” He smiled to himself. “Hard to tell with Feliks. He never talked much, but talking ain’t everything.”

“Who else did he count as friends?”

He gave that some thought. “He got along good with Father Anthony, and there were some ladies at the food shelf who always made a fuss over him, not that he noticed. Also, there was an old woman on the corner. She used to invite him

in for coffee, talked to him in Polish. I don't think he understood a word she said, but she was a good baker. He'd listen to her jabber for hours just to get those pastries."

"Do you recall her name?"

He squinted up at the ceiling. "Amelia? Agnes? Not sure. She's been dead for years."

"Do you know where the priest—Father Anthony, was it? Where he went after he left the parish?"

"Not to another parish. He was too old, close to eighty. Must have passed by now."

"This food shelf Feliks went to, where was that?"

"It's the one on Ashland in that community center. Least it used to be there."

"What about other residents of the boarding house? How well did they know Feliks?"

"They weren't all that friendly. Pretty shiftless bunch, tell you the truth. Apart from me and Feliks, they never stuck around for long. Probably why we got along. Neither one of us was a drinker, and I was past the age where I was looking for females to impress. We'd sit in the backyard when the weather was nice. He'd scribble in his notebooks and I'd read the paper. What was left of it."

Anni glanced through her notes. "So if I want to talk to anyone who knew Feliks, it's pretty much down to the ladies at the food shelf and Father Anthony, if he's still around."

He seemed anxious about disappointing her. "Well, there's Mrs. P's nephew, that hippie, you could ask him. And you might try other churches. Feliks was a regular at every

Catholic church within three, four miles of the house.” He frowned as he scratched his neck, thinking. “Oh, there was the kid, too. Not really a kid, more like your age last time I saw him, though I remember when he was just a boy. Grew up into a skinny guy, showing off his new uniform, all proud. Later he’d come by wearing any old clothes, sweatshirts and jeans and whatnot. Used to bring Feliks pipe tobacco and food from Andy’s Deli when he was in the neighborhood. These little dumplings, like Polish ravioli. Can’t recall what it was called. Feliks loved that stuff. Shame when Andy’s closed. They had the best ham.”

“Do you remember this guy’s name?”

“Oh, let me see. It was . . .” He squinted and looked up at the ceiling, then shook his head. “He used to be a string bean, but he filled out. Got tall, six feet or more, and strong. Had to be for the job, but he had this curly hair and it was always too long, kind of wild. Didn’t shave too regular, either. I was surprised they let him go around looking like that. Thought they had regulations.”

“Regulations?”

“Rules about your appearance. You’d know about that.”

“I would . . . wait, this kid you’re talking about was a cop?”

“That’s what I said, didn’t I? Though he sure didn’t look like it. Looked like a bum. Must have been one of those what d’ye call it, one of them . . . they pretend they’re bad guys selling drugs and stuff?”

“Undercover?”

"Yeah. Otherwise they would have made him get a decent haircut and a shave."

"When was this?"

"Oh, let me think. Andy's closed long time ago." He squinted up at the ceiling, working out the math. "Ten years or more since I last saw him." He massaged his cheekbone. "He grew up in the neighborhood. I got the feeling Feliks might have known him from way back. When he was real small."

"But you don't remember his name."

"It was something foreign. Greek."

She started running through her internal directory of Chicago cops, hunting for Greek names. She knew a few, but none of them remotely fit his description.

"We didn't have many too many Greeks in the neighborhood," he went on. "Russian Orthodox, though. Got those crazy churches with the onion domes every other corner."

"I know. I used to work in the neighborhood. Anything else you can tell me about Feliks?"

"Just that he was a good guy. Quiet, very religious. He would never hurt a kid. Never."

She smiled politely, thinking of all the times she'd heard that line from family members or neighbors, people who had never seen the violent side, or simply kept their eyes averted. "Look, I really appreciate all the time you've given me," she said, closing her laptop and slipping it into her bag.

"My pleasure. I don't get many visitors." He struggled to push himself to his feet. "Take some cookies with you."

"Thanks, I will." She took an Oreo and he beamed with pleasure. "You have my card, right?" she asked.

He fussed around the table beside his chair. "It's somewhere here. Where'd I . . . oh, here it is."

"If you think of that police officer's name, or anything else about Feliks that might help me out, I'd love to hear it. You can call me anytime."

He nodded, but frowned at the card, holding it at arm's length, obviously having difficulty reading it.

"I goofed up when I had them made," she said. "The print is way too small, but I ordered so many, I'll never use them all up." She took the card from him and wrote the phone number on the back in larger digits. "That's better. If you think of anything . . ."

"Got your number right here." He waved the card at her as she left.

Az had left a message, so she called him back. "What's this tip?" he growled.

"I've got something for you, but this is on background. I need your assurance that my name stays out of this."

"Please. You know I protect my sources. What you got?"

"Ben Sidlo, the art historian who's handling that outsider artist's stuff? He's looking for someone to help him get press."

"That's your hot tip? I'm a reporter, not a PR flack."

"The college has one, but Sidlo thinks he's incompetent. He's looking for someone who can write and understands the media."

"That definitely leaves me out, then. I don't know what the fuck's going on in the business these days, other than that it's being run by money guys who don't know a goddamn thing about news. Look, thanks for thinking of me, but I'd rather starve than write rosy press releases."

"I know, but he'll give you an exclusive you could pitch to a magazine or something. He gets his publicity and you get a story."

He didn't respond for a moment. "Those pictures, they give me the willies."

"Me too."

"Gotta wonder what was going on with that guy. You must have investigated kiddy sex cases. Does this guy fit the profile of a pedophile?"

"I don't know enough about him yet. Violence is a dominant feature of his art, if that's what you call it. Whether it's sexually motivated sadism is a question for a shrink."

"What's your angle? You told me you weren't involved."

"I'm not, at least not so far as Danny Truscott is concerned. That's in the hands of the police."

"But . . ."

"Sidlo worked with a friend of mine on an art exhibit, once. I happened to be at the college not long ago and heard him complaining about the college media relations guy, and it occurred to me that you could get some business out of it."

"And?"

"And what? I thought you were looking for work."

"Come on. What's really going on?"

His pit-bull curiosity had clamped on. She knew from experience it couldn't be shaken loose. "I'm doing some research for Sidlo, okay? Finding out what I can about Król's childhood. I need the money, but it's strictly basic background. I don't want Sidlo to put out the idea that the detective who didn't find Danny is back on the case, because I'm not."

"This case still bothers you, doesn't it?"

"Of course it does. Jesus. He was three years old."

"And you were pretty new to the job, back then. Young to be handling a case like that."

"Too young. There were a lot of guys working there with plenty of experience. I don't know why they had me working on it."

"You've seen those pictures. What do you think—"

"Quit it, Az. I'm not the story, okay? I thought I made that clear."

"Yeah, yeah. Only if I work on this, I'm going to have to go into what happened back then. I can talk to you about that, right?"

"No comment."

She ended the call and tossed her phone on the passenger seat, wondering how much she would regret giving Az the tip. She was stuck in a long line of cars backed up at a traffic light, thinking back to those days when she was feeling like a phony, surrounded by more experienced detectives who thought she didn't have what it took to manage a high profile case, when a stray thought popped into her head. She

grabbed her phone and found Pat O'Hara's number. It rang four times before he picked up. "Hi, it's Anni Koskinen again. That cop who used to visit, the one with curly hair. Was his name Slovo? Konstantin Slovo?"

"Well, *there* you go. Told you it was a Greek name. How'd you figure it out?"

"You won't believe this. I used to work with him. I just remembered what a sloppy dresser he was." She didn't add that Slovo was Ukrainian, not Greek. The old man sounded so pleased that he'd helped, she didn't want to put a damper on his glory.

"Small world, huh? Now you got somebody else you can talk to. Like I said, I think him and Feliks went way back, long before I moved to that neighborhood. He might be able to tell you all kinds of stories."

He might, she thought as she nudged her way forward in the traffic. It was a hell of a lead. But he had left Chicago years ago, after a career-ending injury and a messy murder investigation. She had no idea where he was now, or if he would be willing to talk to her.

The traffic was so snarled it took her forty minutes to get home. As she inched her way south, she inventoried what she could remember about Slovo, trying to guess how his life might have intersected with Feliks Król's. It didn't take long to realize that, though they'd worked out of the same office for three years, she knew next to nothing about Slovo's personal life.

Before she'd even met him, she heard he had a hot temper and a problem with authority. He also was known for taking on a lot of tough cases involving children, throwing himself into them without worrying about union rules or overtime caps. Legend had it he cleared every single one of them except the last, the most notorious, the murder of Sharla Peterson.

It was a brutal case. A baby had been suffocated and dismembered, her remains discovered in a city park early one morning by a man walking his dog. A new deputy chief of

detectives who was an early fan of data-driven deployment had noticed Slovo's high clear rate and put him in charge of the investigation based on his numbers, stubbornly refusing to admit he'd made a mistake as the investigation dragged on with non-stop news coverage but no breakthroughs. Detectives were frustrated by having to take orders from somebody so unused to obeying them. He could bust cases working solo but had no skills for case management at scale. It wasn't until Slovo put his fist through a computer monitor and kicked an office chair to pieces that he was relieved, but that brief window when those kinds of cases got solved had closed. It was assigned to someone else and Slovo was ordered to take his accrued vacation. By the time he returned to work, three weeks later, it was made clear he would no longer work on anything high profile, or take on cases involving children.

The Sharla Peterson case remained unsolved for over for over a decade, when a man locked up for another serious crime found Jesus and confessed to a string of offences, including his involvement in the murder. Anni wondered whether Slovo had even heard the case had finally been solved, and that reminded her of the first time she asked him for advice.

A month into the investigation of Danny Truscott's disappearance, she was desperate for a break in the case. One evening, she stayed late, spending several frustrating hours on the telephone with police in Spokane, following up a lead

that didn't pan out. She was alone when Slovo came in. His shirt was torn at the shoulder, and his lip was bleeding.

"You okay?" she asked him.

He dabbed his lip with his sleeve. "Dandy." He made a bee-line for the break room, came back pressing a can of cold pop to his lip. "What are you doing here?" He mumbled around the can.

"Spinning my wheels. Can I ask you something?"

"Shoot."

"It's Danny Truscott. I was—"

He turned and walked away.

"Just wondering if . . ." But she was speaking to his back. She heard him pop the tab on his can as he settled at a computer in a far corner of the room.

"Gee, thanks," she muttered to herself, then pulled over a keyboard to document yet another dead end. She started to go through all the lead sheets again, looking for something else to focus on.

Three hours later, she pushed the file away and rubbed her eyes, trying to locate the headache that lurked just behind them. When she opened them, he was standing beside her desk.

"It's two a.m."

"I know."

"Why're you still here?" He said it as if she were trespassing.

"I don't know. Wasting time. I just . . ." She straightened some papers and set them on top of a pile. "I keep thinking

it's in here. Something I missed, something I'll finally see if I go through it one more time."

He seemed poised to walk away again, but instead rested his hip on the corner of her desk. He ran a finger across the colored tabs that stuck out of the stack. "What's this about?"

"Just trying to get organized." She felt her cheeks grow hot. She'd brought in a package of book darts left over from college and spent too much time color-coding the files. It seemed silly, now, treating the case like a senior thesis, trying to tame the pile of information the way she had tackled term papers. Slovo had joined the police back when no college credits were required. He'd earned his education on the streets, a credential that carried a lot more clout at Area 4 than her college degree.

"My paperwork's a shitpile." He twitched a yellow tab with a fingertip. "Does it work?"

"Nothing works."

"What you got on the parents?"

"The dad has an alibi. It's solid. The mom's a wreck." He raised an eyebrow. "She's practically catatonic. Seriously checked out."

"Any chance she's faking it?"

"No. I mean, come on. It's her kid." He rolled his eyes. "Look, I checked her movements, before and after, okay? I've talked to neighbors, acquaintances. Her only relatives live downstate, and they aren't close. No immediate family, just cousins. They hadn't laid eyes on her since she graduated high school and moved to the city, but they all said she was a

straight arrow. The worst thing anyone had to say about her was that she wasn't sociable, always had her nose in a book. There's no reason to think she might have had a role in it."

"Okay. So, the dad's got an alibi. He could have hired it out."

"But why?"

"What do their finances tell you?" He could see from her expression that she hadn't checked, not closely. "Get those bank statements. Shake the family tree. Maybe something will fall out."

"Okay."

"It's usually the parents, and if it isn't, it's something they did, someone they know. Somebody settling a score."

"Or it could be some whack job, saw an opportunity."

"Could be, but work on the parents. That's where the odds are."

She nodded. He drummed his fingers on the edge of her desk, beating out a tricky syncopated rhythm. "You still seeing that guy? What's his name, O'Neill?"

She was surprised he knew. "Why?"

"Kind of boring, isn't he?"

"Shut up. He's great."

"Coaches Little League. Helps little old ladies across the street."

"You're making that up. I'll bet you've never even met him."

"I know the type. You guys serious?"

"Why are you asking?"

"Just thinking, you know, end of a long day. How about we hit a bar?"

"No thanks."

"Aw, come on. One little drink?"

"I don't go out with guys I work with, like I told you the last time you asked."

"Last time?"

"You don't even remember."

"Who's keeping track?" He tapped out a final beat with his palms. "Fuck it. Stick with boring. Boring is always safe." He shoved off and headed for the door. "Check those financials."

Ten minutes later, she headed out herself. There was plenty going on downstairs in the squad room: a uniformed cop joking with a half-naked man in handcuffs, a teenager loudly complaining he wasn't doing nothing, a jittery woman with tired children clinging to her legs talking a mile a minute to the watch commander who was barely pretending to pay attention, his head propped up with a fist, eyes half shut. Just outside, Slovo leaned against the wall, his phone pressed to his ear. "Come on, just a drink, okay? It's not that late."

He didn't give Anni a glance as she headed for the parking lot. "Jeez, Maura, screw the job. You deserve a little fun." He listened for a moment, then pumped his arm in triumph before saying "Your place? You got it. I'll even pick up a bottle of that fancy-pants wine you like." He pocketed his phone and caught up to Anni in the parking lot. "Have a good evening," he said, heading for his rusty old muscle car as she unlocked hers.

"You too," she said automatically.

"Oh, I will." It was too dark to see it, but she could tell he was grinning.

The financials, it turned out, were interesting. She went over them with a detective who had some training in forensic accounting. They puzzled over them, then got more records and combed through those, too. Truscott had placed a lot of high bets on real estate. She looked at the contractors he was using, and subcontractors, then set up a meeting with an officer in the organized crime unit and showed him what she had. Truscott had stiffed some business associates, from what she could tell, and others were getting paid way too much. He'd been suspiciously lucky at snapping up properties in tax arrears and built his most ambitious project on land the city had seized through a controversial use of eminent domain. She connected the dots to show that he could be playing some kind of a role as an intermediary between criminally-connected business enterprises and crooked city officials, taking a nice cut for himself and making some dangerous enemies along the way.

The officer listened to her without expression, then leaned forward and explained where the holes were in her theory, why there was a perfectly legitimate explanation for everything she'd uncovered, how nobody built anything in Chicago without pulling a few strings. Getting a simple building permit depended on who you knew, and Truscott's

projects were massively complex. If everything looked clean and simple—now, *that* would be suspicious.

Later that day she got a reminder that Brian Truscott had friends in city hall. Her boss's boss called her into his office and in an avuncular way advised her to stop embarrassing herself, making crazy accusations about a crime victim, a pillar of the community. That only made her more determined to see if there was something there, but after getting unofficial advice from her friend Jim Tilquist, who was working on public corruption cases for the FBI, she had to admit that Brian Truscott had been reckless with his financial arrangements and canny about how to please his pals at Daley Plaza, but nothing clearly pointed to a solid motive for someone to harm his kid. She set that line of inquiry aside and went back through everything else, looking for loose ends, double-checking alibis and reinterviewing witnesses and possible suspects.

The week before the anniversary of Danny's disappearance, she systematically reviewed the entire record, make sure there wasn't anything she'd overlooked. She got up to stretch and noticed Slovo was in the office, tipped back with his feet on a desk, shooting rubber bands at the ceiling. There was a sport jacket hung over the back of his chair and he was wearing a rumpled dress shirt and a tie at half-mast, apparently preparing for a court appearance, the only thing that could coax him into the office during daylight hours. She knew he had an impressive web of informants. If you ever needed to know who was doing what to whom on the West Side, he

could either tell you or make a quick phone call and find out. She strolled over and caught his eye.

“Got a minute?” she asked.

“Sure.” He dropped his feet to the floor and scooped the clutter on the desk with his arm to clear a space for her to sit.

“Working on that gang thing?” She nodded at the pile of papers and crumpled soda cans around his computer.

“Trial prep. I was supposed to testify today.” He picked up a sheet of paper, let it fall into his lap, rubbed his eyes. “How much do you want to bet they’re working out a plea? I feel a coma coming on. What’s up?”

“Next Tuesday it will be a year since Danny Truscott disappeared,” she said, bracing herself for his reaction. He didn’t say anything, but he didn’t storm off, so she continued. “I went through all the registered sex offenders again, plus people who were suspects but never convicted. But that’s just the guys we know about. You know any rumors about guys who might be under the radar?”

“I would have said.” He picked up a sheet of paper as if he’d finally found something interesting to read.

“Yeah. I just thought . . . I keep feeling like I’m missing something. I did what you said, went through the family financials and the dad’s business records. Didn’t turn up anything that sticks, even though there’s something off about him.”

He glanced up.

“I can’t make any connection between his business dealings

and Danny,” she explained, “but he’s slimy. He puts on this good-guy act, but it’s all calculated, part of his public image.”

“Saint Brian of Evanston.”

“But he’s such a phony. He’s crazy reckless with money, just to show off. And I hate the way he acts around his kids. He ignores the girl completely, and all he does with his older son is look tragic and talk about how he’s going to get him cured one day. Basically, saying right in front of him how great it would be if he wasn’t such a loser. I mean, jeez. Doesn’t he get how that must make the kid feel?”

Slovo picked up another rubber band, flexed it between his fingers. “So, he’s a crummy dad, like most of them. So what?”

“I know. It’s just—” She realized it was the way Brian treated Philip that really goaded her. She’d been through it so many times with her brother Martin, people saying in his hearing what a burden autism was, telling her about some crackpot cure they’d read about on the Internet. “When I see this guy with his son, I just want to punch him out.”

“That usually works.”

She laughed. Slovo had a reputation for letting his temper off the leash, and at least once had been disciplined for beating up a suspect. He squinted at a light fixture, took aim and swore when the rubber band fell short. She went over it in her head, the lists that kept forming when she lay awake at night. “What am I missing?”

“Nothing. For fuck’s sake, Koskinen.” He sat up suddenly. “What makes this case so special? You realize how many new homicides we got this month?”

"I know. I've been working on that double in Little Village."

"Barely. You're too busy triple-checking your work on a case that's a year old. Is it because they're rich, from up the shore? Your people?"

"That's not—"

"That double of yours? Two young men, teenagers. *Kids*. They got mothers, they got families. Maybe you could give a shit for a change."

He stood up and shoved his chair in so hard it made a sheaf of papers slide off the desk onto the floor. "I'm going for a smoke, okay?" he said loudly to a detective who had turned to look.

"What'd I say?" he asked as Slovo banged out of the room. "That guy's an asshole," he explained to Anni, as if she didn't know.

She picked up the papers that had fanned across the floor and set them on Slovo's chair, then went back to her desk where she flipped through Danny's file to make sure everything was in order, tapped the bundle straight, and set it aside, turning to the double shooting, feeling furious. *I'll show you*. Knowing he was right.

That was the day the case went cold, at least in her mind. She still kept an eye out for anything promising—another big real estate deal for Brian Truscott, the arrest of a child molester. Tips came in from time to time, and she ran them down. Once a month she made a systematic search for possi-

bly related incidents. Then she would call Joyce Truscott to tell her that they had nothing new.

Over the years, it had grown routine. She'd fill Joyce in, and they would chat briefly. Joyce would ask her about the house she'd bought and tell her about Cassie's progress in school, about something funny that Philip had done. After the elder boy was moved to an expensive boarding school in Arizona, Joyce stopped talking about him. She never mentioned Brian, not once. She always thanked Anni for calling.

The case would never be officially cold, not when his father was so frequently on television, a media expert on missing children. The department probably still got calls out of the blue, sightings based on the progressively-aged photos posted online. If Brian had anything to do with it, Danny would never be forgotten. But Anni was willing to bet Joyce had been.

When she finally got home, she made a sandwich as she called Shirley McGrath and left a voice mail. She took bites of her sandwich in between typing up notes from her conversation with Pat O'Hara. Then she turned her attention to finding Konstantin Slovo, which she thought would be easy. She was wrong.

There was no current information about him in any of the databases she typically used for background checks. He hadn't registered to vote, purchased property, or been convicted of a crime in recent years so far as she could tell. He didn't have a current driver's license in any of the fifty states and he wasn't

using Facebook or LinkedIn or Twitter, at least not under his own identity. His name had been in the news around the time of the shooting that ended his career with the CPD, and cropped up again a few months later when he was peripherally involved in an investigation in Maine, but after that he seemed to step off the planet and disappear.

By mid-afternoon, she was no closer to figuring out where he was now, but she had learned, to her surprise, that he had an ex-wife and four brothers, two living in the Chicago area. She spoke with his ex and his oldest brother and left messages for two others. The fourth was two decades into a prison sentence and had long ago broken off contact with his family. Slovo had almost as thoroughly distanced himself. He phoned his oldest brother, Steve, a couple times a year, typically at times when he knew nobody would be home, leaving messages that did little other than confirm he was alive. The last voice mail had been left two days before Christmas.

She set that quest aside, frustrated, and returned to the project files stored on the Stony Cliff College server. She skimmed through the grant proposal and some supporting documentation. She browsed through the database of materials found in Król's room, finding nothing of interest. That left the scanned notebooks. She decided to make more coffee before looking at them. She also watered the plants and checked her email and went into the bathroom to see if it needed cleaning. Finally, she quit stalling.

When Dugan called to say he was going to stop by, she was a little dazed. "What? Oh, yeah. Sure."

"You sound like you're in the middle of something."

"No." She closed her laptop and set it aside.

"What's up?"

He always knew. She took a deep breath. "I've been looking through Król's notebooks. I think I need a shower."

"Oh boy."

"Not like it's, you know, explicit or anything. It's just gruesome and weird." She closed her eyes and rubbed them, trying to chase away the images of children being beaten, burned, hanged, choked, ensnared by monsters with fleshy, probing tentacles. "I need a break from this. When do you get off?"

"I'm on my way out the door. I can pick up some fish to grill. I'd like to see you. Can I come to your place?"

"Great. I'll make a salad."

"Right." He paused. "See you."

She checked the mostly-empty refrigerator, then pulled on a jacket, trotted down the porch steps and unlocked her bike, planning a route that would give her some much-needed exercise and take in a favorite bakery and a grocery that had edible produce and decent wine. It was a relief to be outdoors, feeling crisp wind against her face, putting distance between her and that twisted, unsettling, yet eerily beautiful world that Feliks Król's imagination had created.

Dugan's jeep was parked on the street by the time Anni finished shopping, but there were no lights glowing from her second-floor flat. She went through the gangway to the rear entrance, locked her bike, and carried her bags up the steps, wondering where Dugan was, feeling apprehensive. His last words on the phone—had his voice sounded a little weird? She played it back, looking for clues. She wished she could read him as clearly as he did her.

He was sitting at the kitchen table, not lounging on the couch as usual. "What are you doing in the dark?" she asked, hitting the switch with her elbow.

"Thinking." His mouth tightened and he took a breath. "Trying to figure out how to say this."

Something squeezed her chest hard. The bags slid from her hands, the wine bottle clanking on the floor. She closed her eyes, the lights too bright.

"Hey, sweetie. It's okay." She heard his chair scrape across

the floor, felt his arms around her. "Shit. It's not that, whatever you're thinking."

She pressed her face into his chest and listened to his heart, a steady *thump thump thump*. She took a deep breath, and then another. Then she pushed away and rubbed at the tears with the heel of her hand, feeling ridiculous.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Are *we* okay?"

"We're okay. We're great."

"Good. Fuck. Don't do that again." She reached for a kitchen towel and scrubbed her face with it. "Sorry. Oh, God, it's your family. What happened?"

"Nothing. Everybody's all right. The bullshit at work just got a little deeper, that's all." He picked up the bottle of wine, checked to see if it was intact, then opened it and filled two glasses. He pushed one across the table toward her. "I'm never going to leave you. Not ever. You know that, right?"

"Dammit." She had grab the towel again. "Quit it, Dugan." She started laughing. It turned into hiccups.

He took their glasses and bottle to the couch. "Come here." She sat on the couch beside him. His arm went around her and she leaned in, fitting into that spot where she felt so at home. Where she felt safe, except when that familiar threat of abandonment came at her like a straight line windstorm, ripping away her sense of balance, of security. It had come up before. Dugan knew it was a remnant of being left with her brother and a box of powdered donuts in a train station, with hardly any memories of a mother who had decided strangers

would take better care of her kids than she could. "How'd you end up with such a basket case?" she said.

"You're fine." They kissed for a while.

"So, tell me," she said, sitting up. "How bad is it?"

He tipped his head, gave a little shrug. *Bad*, she thought to herself.

"It's this stupid task force I'm on. It's a political powder keg. Everybody's touchy about the possibility of a leak. We don't want the subjects to know they're under investigation. If the press got wind of it, it would be bad. People high up would get raked across the coals. Could lose their jobs. Thing is, a name cropped up in the investigation. Turns out there's a connection to one of your cases. I can't say—"

"Of course not."

"But the upshot is . . ." He paused to sip from his glass and find the words. "I got called in for a talk today. Our relationship has become an issue. Not for me. I'd chuck the god-damned task force in an instant, get back to doing real work, but that's not an option. The head of this task force, he's got juice, he calls the shots. So, I say to him, fine. You don't think I can be trusted? I don't need this shit. I'll resign."

"No. Dugan, you can't."

"Huh. That's what he said."

"No way I'm letting that happen."

"I could get another job."

"Not one you want. No way. You will *not* resign, you hear me?"

Dugan held up a hand. "Shh. I hear you. So do the neigh-

bors. I'm not in any hurry to burn bridges. I talked to Bridget about it."

Dugan's sister, the book-smart one, the one who had put in her time in uniform before moving up the ranks, leaving to get a law degree, graduating with honors and getting snapped up by the Federal Attorney's office for the Northern District of Illinois. She could analyze things more dispassionately than her brothers.

"She suggested I get together with Emil, which I did," he added. "Guess what he said."

"Don't resign?"

"You people are so predictable."

Emil was the given name of the chief of detectives. Not too many people were in a position to call him by his first name, but the Dugans were so rooted in the department that the chief had probably dandled Dugan on his knee when he was a baby and sent a gift for his first communion.

Dugan wrapped Anni in his arms and rested his chin on her head. "I won't do anything hasty, but you need to know this: The job's not that important to me, Anni. Not as important as you."

"Don't be dumb. It's more important than you know. Please don't wreck your career. I don't want that on my conscience."

"It wouldn't wreck anything. Kevin already promised he'd find me a job."

"In the suburbs?"

"They have crime, too. Didn't you hear? The burbs are the

new urban blight. Bridget said I could probably get hired as an investigator with her outfit if I really want out.” Dugan stroked Anni’s arm. “Besides, Emil says he can get me back to violent crimes. I told him he had three weeks.”

“You’re giving orders to the chief of detectives?”

“They’re questioning my integrity. I’d never jeopardize a case. They should know that.”

“Yeah, but even the appearance. Potentially a political shit-storm. I can see why they’re being cautious.”

“We agreed to a month. If I don’t get off this task force and back to my real job by then, I’m out.”

“But meanwhile, we have to stop meeting like this.” She tried to smile.

“Yeah, probably. That would be best. For now. It’s shitty. I’m sorry.”

“No. I get it. I always knew I’d mess things up for you.”

“You’re not—”

“It even makes your family uncomfortable.” He started to protest, but she interrupted him. “I testified against a fellow cop.”

“You told the truth.”

“But still, you don’t do that.”

“They need to get over it.”

“You’re so stubborn.”

“Code of the Dugans. Come here.” She leaned back into his chest. They slid deeper into the couch, then moved to the bed.

Afterward, as they lay together, Anni’s ear was pressed

to Dugan's bare chest, his heart slowing to a steady beat. Thump, thump, thump.

"Sorry I freaked out," she murmured, finally. "It's like with my brother. I get a little nuts when I think something bad might happen to him. I've always worried this would end."

"I told you, I'm not leaving you, Anni Koskinen," Dugan mumbled into her hair.

"A month won't be so bad," she said, then added, "It'll be awful. A whole month?"

"Maybe less. Emil knows I'm serious." He found that ticklish place and made Anni giggle and writhe to get away from his finger. "Besides, we haven't told my mom about this yet. She's my nuclear option. Let's get going on supper."

It felt weird, working on a meal together. So familiar. So fragile.

Dugan asked about her day. As she washed lettuce and he chopped things up for the salad she told him about finding Pat O'Hara, about discovering a former colleague had actually known Feliks Król. That made him stop and stare at her.

"Slovo? For real?"

"Are you pointing that at me?" Dugan looked at the knife in his hand and set it down.

"Have you told Franklin and McGrath?"

"I left Shirley a message. Haven't heard back from her yet. Did you know him?"

"By reputation."

"We overlapped at Harrison for a few years." She crushed

a garlic clove for the salad dressing. “So to speak. We never actually worked together, though he did hit on me a couple of times.”

Dugan snorted. “That’s the reputation.”

“Did you know he was married?”

“No way.”

“I talked to his ex. Weird conversation. They were high school sweethearts, she said. Can you even picture that? By the time I knew him, he was trying to pick up every woman who came within range, like he was trying for a record or something. Though that doesn’t make much sense; he never hung out with the guys, comparing how many women they scored that week.”

“Oh, is that what we do?”

“You know what I mean. Guys like to brag. Even when he was assigned to a team, he mostly worked solo, at least until Robin Freeling transferred over from wherever she had been.”

“Headquarters.” The room was suddenly cooler, as if the sun had gone behind the clouds.

“You worked together there?”

“No, she left before I got there. But I knew her.”

“She was awesome.”

“Yes, she was.” He ran out of scallions.

She handed him a celery stalk. “I thought she would be our first woman superintendent. Never understood why she wanted to work with him, of all people. Not a great career move.”

"She was trying to prove something. *Goddammit*." He stuck the finger he had just sliced in his mouth.

"Ow. Need a bandage?"

"Check the fish, first." He mumbled and nodded toward the stove. She handed him a paper towel to wrap around his finger before pulling the salmon and grilled shrimp out from under the broiler. "Looks done."

Dugan headed to the bathroom medicine cabinet to find a bandage while she filled plates with fish and salad and chunks of crusty bread and refilled their wine glasses. They ate at the kitchen table, talking about city politics, the weather, comparing crazy neighbors. Not talking about the lonely month ahead.

They carried the bottle out to the back porch. It had been the first day that actually felt like spring, and the setting sun lit up the sling-back canvas chairs they positioned to catch the lingering warmth. Dugan frowned down at Anni's tiny backyard. He'd helped her turn what had been a barren, weedy scrap of land into a proper garden with a brick patio and raised beds that had overflowed with blossoms. In recent weeks he'd cleared away the dead stalks, but nothing had come up yet. At his place, crocuses and snowdrops were blooming and his windowsills were crowded with seedlings ready to put out as soon as the threat of frost had passed. He was probably thinking about how terrible her garden would look after a month without his attention. She didn't know a dandelion from a dahlia.

"She was three years older than me," he finally said. "Funny how much that matters when you're kids."

It took Anni a moment to figure out he was talking about Robin Freeling. "You knew each other growing up?"

"Our families were tight. She was always organizing things. Tournaments, contests. Seeing who was brave enough to jump off the roof of the garage, stuff like that."

"Who won, Frank or Kevin?" They'd been in competition since toddlerhood and never missed a chance to show each other up.

"Are you kidding? Robin always won." He smiled at the memory, but it faded fast.

"Funny. She seemed so level-headed to me," Anni said. "Why she wanted to work with Slovo surprised the hell out of me. What was she trying to prove? That she was tough? Or that she could tame wild beasts?"

"It was her father."

"I remember him. He was a big wheel."

"He was an asshole." He took a gulp of wine, wiped his mouth with his fist. "Robin was an only child, so it all fell on her, fulfilling his dreams. He made sure she would be in line for a white shirt job. She thought she needed more street experience if she was going to have any credibility. Pissed him off when she ignored his instructions and went to Area Four."

"Huh. This sounds like someone I know."

"Yeah, but my mother's not an asshole," he pointed out. "Headstrong and opinionated, but not enough to cross into

asshole territory. Most of the time. Also, I didn't transfer to spite my mom," he added. "Robin kind of did. I mean, she had a point; the guys are hard on supervisors who don't go through the ranks, and for a woman it would be even worse. Tactically, the move made sense. But mostly she was fed up with her dad trying to manage her career. She was declaring her independence."

"And it got her killed."

"No, he got her killed."

"There were rumors, but I thought Slovo was cleared."

"Not him. Her dad." He hesitated. "A guy who hated Bill Freeling knew how to hurt him the worst way possible. His daughter being on a dark street on the West Side in the middle of the night just made it easier."

That was so surprising it took Anni a minute to process it. "You mean—"

"The guy they nailed finally? Bill had put him away. When he got out, he knew how to get even."

"I had no idea."

"It's not common knowledge. There was so much press attention already, and Bill was a wreck. Nobody wanted to make it worse for him."

"Losing your kid like that, it's got to be hard. Even for assholes."

"I just wish that son of a bitch had gone after Bill, not Robin. She was . . ." He scowled at the garden for a while. "You ever meet her boyfriend? His name was Ewen. What kind of name is that?"

"I saw him at the funeral."

"Where he was so distraught his brothers had to hold him up? That clip they kept running on television? Took him less than a year to get married to someone else." He rubbed his eyes, looking weary. "Slovo," he muttered to himself. "That's just too fucking weird."

"I asked for his advice on Danny's case. He had a lot of experience with cases that involved kids."

"Like Sharla Peterson."

"That was his last. I was just finishing up at the academy when that happened, and by the time I got to Area Four everyone told me he was through handling those cases, but I was desperate and I figured he might have some pointers for me."

"Did he?"

"Nothing that made any difference. I'd really like to find out what he knows about Król. I wonder where he is these days?"

"Boston."

"Really? Do you have—"

"Last I heard, but that was three years ago. He probably moved on by now."

She could hear in his tone one of those lines being drawn, the kind they couldn't cross. The kind that was going to keep them apart for a month. She didn't want to think about it and said, instead, "I knew he went out East, but I thought it was some small town. Weird, how he took off in the middle of the investigation."

“Turned up in Maine. The cops out there weren’t sure what to make of him. Leaving in the middle of all that, it didn’t look good.”

“It didn’t make any sense. He and Robin were total opposites, but they really clicked. Not fooling around or anything. They just made a good team. I couldn’t figure out why he took off like that. You’d think he would do anything to find out who was responsible.”

“He got injured too, probably wasn’t exactly rational at the time.”

“None of us were.” Things always went a little nuts when a fellow officer was killed in the line of duty. The work went on, but with everyone on edge, simmering with anger and loss and a heightened sense of vulnerability. Usually the anger was directed outward, at *them*, the ones who didn’t wear blue, who didn’t get it, but in this case it looked at first as if she’d been shot by her own partner and that made everything more complicated.

Anni suddenly had a vivid memory of Robin laughing as Slovo pecked, two-fingered, on a computer, saying “That’s not how you spell it, you dope!” Giving him a backhanded slap on the shoulder and taking his place at the keyboard. He’d scowled at his partner, just clowning. Usually there was something sexual in the way he leaned toward a woman, touched an arm, or studied her from across the room with his sleepy eyes. It was never like that with Robin. Between them there was the kind of rough and ready closeness of siblings, and it seemed to develop instantly.

"I spent a lot of time at that house after the shooting," Dugan said. "Bill's place. He was going crazy, but there were always people with him, people who cared. Bringing food. Christ, that kitchen. It was like a non-stop Thanksgiving dinner, only nobody felt like eating. I guess it's some kind of release to try to fit another goddamn casserole into the freezer."

"It was like that when Jim died." Her friend Jim, who'd faded away in a hospital room, surrounded by machines that beeped and blinked, leaving a big empty place in her chest that still ached. Dugan reached over and laced his fingers in hers. The sun had slipped behind the rooftops and shadows were filling the backyard.

"Don't ever get shot," she said.

"No way. My mom would kill me."

"She'd have to get in line."

"Getting chilly out here," he murmured after a minute, giving her hand a squeeze. "Let's go inside and warm up."

That night Anni lay in the dark looking up at the ceiling, thinking about Dugan. There was still a dent in her mattress where he'd lain. She ran her palm across it. Already cold.

A month.

She knew how hard it was to leave the job that was your life's work. She didn't want to put Dugan through that. If time ran out, if the chief of detectives didn't come through, she should find a way to break up with him. She'd been on her own before. He'd find somebody. She rolled over and

pressed her face into her pillow, wanting to scream and break things.

Then she lay on her back, forcing her mind to go blank. No need to imagine the worst, not until she had to. She found herself thinking about Jim Tilquist and the night he lay on the grass beside her, blood gurgling out when he tried to speak, that crowded funeral where she imagined that behind those grim faces officers were thinking it was all her fault, that she should have been the one in the casket. She thought about the morning after the night Robin Freeling died, the anger crackling across the room, arcing and sizzling, ready to lash out at something, anything. All signs said the cop she'd partnered with, the guy who was too close to his snitches, had taken her into a bad situation and tried to shoot his way out of it. When he took off abruptly, like a man on the run, Anni and everyone else who'd worked with him was left wondering who he really was.

She'd have to track him down and find out.

Even with the Boston lead, it wasn't easy.

Shirley McGrath was politely unhelpful, like a big soft wall made out of pillows reinforced with steel. "We'll check it out," she said abstractedly, as if she had something more important on her mind. "I know somebody at the BPD I can ask. But honestly, if Slovo had any suspicions about the guy, he would have said something when Danny disappeared, right? Sounds like a dead end. I wouldn't waste your time on it." She was more interested in Anni's conversation with Joyce and made her go over it more than once.

In spite of her dismissal, or maybe because of it, Anni wasn't going to give up. She harvested names of detectives involved in recent investigations covered in the *Boston Globe*, then called the BPD and bluffed her way into speaking with a couple of them. When she asked if they knew the whereabouts of a former Chicago cop who had moved to Boston, she got a range of responses from wariness to outright hostile-

ity; still, she couldn't shake the feeling they were familiar with his name. Her last call was to a civilian assistant working for the chief of detectives, who said she'd pass her query along. Right into a trash can, from the sound of it.

When she called the police department of the small town in Maine where Slovo had been peripherally involved in an investigation the chief told her straight up that he didn't have a clue where he was and even if he did, he wouldn't share that information with a P.I. It wasn't the first time she'd run into that attitude.

After taking call-backs from two of Slovo's brothers, neither of whom had spoken to him in years and had no idea where he was living, she set that search aside to tackle other leads. She didn't get much more out of interviewing people at the local food shelf or speaking with priests at four churches where Feliks Król had attended services. Those who remembered Król knew little about him and seemed to take it as given that he was somehow responsible for Danny's disappearance. Her final interview that day was with her friend, Father Sikora, the pastor at the Catholic church closest to her house and within range of Król's daily pilgrimages.

The rectory was a large house that once was home to a handful of priests but which had had been converted into a community center. She had been lucky to snag an appointment with Sikora, the only priest serving a busy parish. Though he was in his late seventies, he had a seemingly inexhaustible well of energy for his routine of baptisms, weddings, funerals, spiritual counseling, and masses. She waited

in the hall outside his office until it was her turn, smelling a familiar perfume of floor polish, candle wax, and a hint of moth balls that seemed to permeate the building.

“How are you?” he asked when she took the chair across from his cluttered desk. Coming from him, those words weren’t merely a greeting; they were diagnostic. Though she wasn’t religious, she had confided in him things that nobody else knew, not even Dugan.

“I’m fine, but I could use your help. I’m looking for information on Feliks Król.”

Sikora frowned, not placing the name until she showed him a photo. “Oh, him. He’s a regular here, though come to think of it I haven’t seen him for a long time.”

“He died last January.”

“Sorry to hear that. He used to attend mass like clockwork, no matter what the weather was like.”

“That may be what killed him. He caught pneumonia. Did you know he was an artist?”

“Huh. Must have been before I met him.”

She passed over a stack of printouts. “He was doing this kind of work right up to his death. Nobody knew about it until his landlord went to clear out his room.”

Sikora shuffled through the images, frowning and wincing. “Strange,” he said, setting the pages down. “Even though I saw him at least twice a week for more than twenty years, I never got to know him. He showed up for the daily mass on Tuesdays and the Saturday evening service, but he never talked to anybody.”

“Saturday evening. That’s the Polish mass, right? He knew Polish?”

He frowned, thinking. “I’m not sure. It’s the most traditional of our services. He may have chosen it for that reason, or because it fit his schedule. I knew he attended mass at several parishes. Always on foot. He must have walked miles to do it. Only a few people attend our daily mass, and they tend to be elderly folks who are lonely, who need the social connection. Not him. His only interest was in the liturgy.”

“You ever talk to him?”

“Yes, but he never responded. I figured he was on the spectrum. He liked the ritual practices, the sameness, the routine. We got new missals once, and he was annoyed for weeks. I thought he was odd, but harmless.”

“Me, too. Until I saw those pictures.”

He spread them out on the desk again. “You think they’re a sign of sexual deviance?”

“All that violence? That’s not normal.”

“What’s normal?” He picked one up and studied it. “These images fit within a certain Catholic tradition. Martyrdom, mortification of the flesh, spiritual awakening through suffering. Nobody wants to suffer, these days. Thinking about pain is out of fashion, except for Dr. Phil and celebrity gossip. We don’t like to think about our own mortality.” He gestured toward the crucifix on the wall, a simple geometric shape made of polished metal, abstract and modernist except for the twisted, tortured human figure hanging from it.

“When I was in Guatemala,” he went on. “I thought the

gospel was all about making things better for the people. Liberation theology. Some of the older parishioners weren't interested in that social justice crap. This one woman who lived in a shack that most people in this country wouldn't use as a doghouse come to mass every Sunday crawling on her bare knees. Right across the plaza."

"Jeez. That's kind of warped, isn't it?"

"Oh no, embarrassing behavior in a public place!" He waved his hands in mock distress. "Okay, it hurt to watch, but it's how she worshiped, and it's a kind of spirituality that has a long history in the Christian tradition."

"Basically, suffering is good for you? Works out great for rich people."

He laughed. "You've heard the phrase, 'comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable?' That was more my style. You can bet I tried to set her straight, because liberal white guys from *el Norte* know best, right? Guess how that went? She couldn't laugh in my face, because you don't do that to priests, but she nodded politely and then did it again next week."

"Damn. That's messed up."

"Look, that woman was going to take her own spiritual path no matter what I said. Defying her priest? She was powerful in a way that we don't see so much anymore."

"These pictures Feliks Król painted . . . you think they're religious like that?"

"Could be an element, anyway."

"Every victim in his pictures is a child. Half the time they're

naked. He watched kids in the neighborhood. He gave them presents. Then he painted pictures of them being hurt.”

Sikora sighed. “Did he have a record?”

“Not for molestation, just little stuff. Trespassing, a run-in with a shop owner.”

“But you’re here for a reason.”

“A child went missing ten years ago. Some of his clothing was found among Feliks Król’s things.”

The old priest closed his eyes. He didn’t say anything for a moment. “I heard something about it on the radio,” he murmured, then cleared his throat. “You think he was responsible?”

“That’s for the police to find out. I’m just trying to learn what I can about the man’s life.”

Sikora nodded, lost in thought. “All these years, I thought he was a simple man who only came to mass for the ritual,” he said finally, picking up one of the pictures and staring at it for a minute before adding softly, “He was tormented, and I had no idea.”

They talked about other things until his next appointment arrived and Anni headed home to write up her notes. Somehow they’d pivoted from discussing the fact Król had spent at least part of his childhood in a Catholic orphanage to her memories of being put into foster care with her brother, constantly worried that that Martin would be sent to an institution and she would be left all alone. A dread of abandonment that, Sikora pointed out in his understated way, began with

their mother vanished from their lives, leaving a void that was only years later filled with the knowledge her mom had done something hard because she had to, because she knew she couldn't take care of them. Was that why she searched for missing kids who ran away when their illness pursued them? Was that why Król watched kids, not out of twisted affection but because he felt they needed someone to watch over them? Their conversation set up a strange cross-current in her emotions. Sikora's skillful listening had awakened a sense of empathy with Król that rubbed up uncomfortably against the disgust and disquiet that his art brought out in her.

The next day she deposited a summary of her notes on the Stony Cliff server among the other project files and sent a more detailed copy to Shirley McGrath. Then she dialed Joyce Truscott's number.

"Yell-oh. Brian here."

Joyce's husband, the relentlessly positive media star. Anni barely resisted an urge to hang up. "Could I speak to Joyce, please?"

"And you are?"

"Tell her it's Anni."

"Anni . . ." he rolled the syllables around as if he were tasting them. "Anni Koskinen! I thought your voice was familiar. How you doing? Things have been crazy around here, I can tell you. Film crews on the lawn, constant requests for interviews. I'm expecting a call from the BBC this afternoon, would you believe it?"

"Then maybe I'd better—"

“It’s not until the top of the hour. How *are* you? Joyce told me you set up your own business. How’s it going? This economy, we’ve had our challenges, you can imagine, and Springfield politics, oh man. What a mess. But you know something?”

He lowered his voice like the narrator of an infomercial with a really special offer if you called right now. “You think your world is crashing down around you? Soon as one door closes, another one opens. This construction project of ours that’s been held up by red tape forever? It’s on its way, now, thanks to a few things finally coming together. And man, the outpouring of support we’ve had for Danny in the past few weeks, it’s just tremendous.”

“That’s good. Could I talk to Joyce for a minute?”

“Yeah, I’ll get her. This has been tough on her, you know. She’s so sensitive. You wouldn’t know it from the outside, but I know her better than anybody and I can see how much it’s tearing her up. Hope is hard, but we need it, right Anni?”

“Well, I—”

“Because I truly believe that we’re going to find Danny.” He sounded stern, now. “If I didn’t have faith, if I just gave up, what kind of father would I be? If I didn’t do everything in my power to bring him back, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself.” She wondered if he was using her as a proxy for Joyce, trying to bully her into optimism. “Let me ask you this: what did you think when you found that little shirt of his, those sandals?”

Anni realized this time he was actually waiting for an answer. "I was shocked. I was surprised."

"And you thought to yourself, 'here they are in this squalid little room, in the hands of man who had sick obsessions. This doesn't look good.' Come on, isn't that what you thought?"

"I thought 'The police need to know about this. It could be a lead.'"

He laughed, a hearty, wholesome, full-chested chortle. "Excellent! So you're an optimist, too."

She was speechless, stumped how he got there from what she said, but he plowed ahead. "Good for you. There's too much negativity in the world. Okay, so . . ."

"Joyce?"

"Oh right, she's in the garden."

She heard a clunk as he set the receiver down, his voice calling out. A couple of minutes later, she heard Joyce's hesitant greeting.

"Hi, it's Anni. I'm sorry, I don't have any news. I just wanted to check in."

"I appreciate it."

"I've learned a few things about Król I found the house he lived in when he was born. He spent some time in an orphanage after his mother died or got sick or something. I'm trying to reach a cop I used to work with who grew up in the neighborhood and apparently knew him pretty well. This guy retired and moved out east a while ago. I'm having trouble tracing him, but I'll keep trying. None of this helps us find out what happened to Danny, of course."

"It could. You never know."

"I'm sharing what I've found with the police, of course."

"They don't seem to be getting anywhere. You don't have any theories? Any idea what might have happened?"

Anni thought about Brian's insistence that bind optimism would produce his son, somehow, about another kind of faith that led people to crawl to church on their knees. "No, sorry. I don't know enough about this guy yet to speculate."

"I don't mean to be pushy. I just thought maybe . . . well, never mind." She took a breath and caught it, like a sigh being pulled back inside.

"I'll keep you filled in if I learn more."

"Thank you. I appreciate it, really. Let me give you my cell number, just in case." Anni jotted it down as she read it off. "That art historian of yours had a meeting with Brian this week," Joyce added. "He's making a documentary or something. Oh, and a reporter who's doing a magazine article came by earlier today. He said he knew you. He had an Armenian name, but I can't quite . . ."

"Az Abkerian."

"That's it. He had a lot of questions."

"I'm sorry. This must be awful."

"He wasn't as pushy as some of them, and if he's your friend, I feel better."

"He's a good journalist, but he's after a story. You don't owe him anything."

"Brian did all the talking, anyway."

Anni had trouble stifling a snort. "How's Cassie handling all this?"

"She's being Cassie. She almost got arrested for pushing a television cameraman into a busy street."

"Good for her."

"I'm just happy she didn't get charged with anything. She doesn't need more trouble. Brian's making faces at me. Need to keep the landline open for the BBC." She sounded dryly amused as she said goodbye.

Anni had one last task to take care of, her weekly visit to check on Josh McLaren. They'd talked on the phone twice in the past week. Though he didn't say anything obviously delusional, she sensed he was humming with the kind of disjointed and anxious energy that preceded psychotic episodes.

After following a resident into the lobby, she climbed the flights to Josh's apartment, and knocked. "It's me, Anni." He opened the door a crack and stared at her. His gaze was flat, as if he was staring at a two-way mirror, with her on the hidden side. She let him look, then gently pushed at the door. He let her in.

"You can't stay long. I'm in the middle of something." He gestured at his desk, cluttered with a pile of books and papers. He hadn't shaved and the room smelled like old socks and sweat. The trash can beside the desk was full of energy bar wrappers and pop cans. "The one-third two-thirds conjecture. I've solved it. I just have to get the proof down."

"This is a paper for one of your classes?"

He sighed. "I'm not taking classes, remember? They kicked me out. They'll be embarrassed when this gets published. This is one of the major unsolved problems in the field. It could make me rich, and I wouldn't have to rely on my parents anymore."

He paused to listen intently as someone walked across the floor in the apartment upstairs. Then he reached over to the closed blinds to hook a finger into them to peer outside. "I have to get it published right away. I mean, people want to get the credit for themselves."

"Josh, I know you don't want to hear this, but I think you're too revved up. I'm concerned."

"That's what you always say. You don't think I can do this."

"I think you're incredibly smart. But what I'm seeing is what happened before. When did you last take a shower?"

"Oh, that 'self-care' bullshit. They put a label on you, it's over. Nobody takes you seriously. This is real. I've solved a problem that nobody else could, but you think I'm insane."

"I don't know enough about math to make that call. I just know how you're acting, and it worries me."

"I just made a breakthrough, so yeah, I'm a little excited."

"Have you talked to your shrink about this?"

"Why? She's not a mathematician."

"Yeah, but this is a big deal for you and it's affecting your moods."

He sighed impatiently and tugged at his hair, as if his scalp felt too tight. "It's a big deal for everyone. The implications

are massive. Didn't you get what I was saying? I could make a lot of money with this. They might give me the Field Medal."

"When's your next appointment?"

"I saw her just yesterday. Look, I have to get this down and uploaded to a preprint server. But I'm not putting my affiliation on it, because the university doesn't deserve it. Not the way they've treated me."

"Okay. I'll let you be. Can I use your bathroom before I go, though?"

He waved a hand. Fine, whatever. She headed down the hallway and slipped into his bedroom. There was a pill box on the floor beside his bed, one with a compartment for each day of the week. The empty sections matched the calendar, so at least it seemed he was taking his meds. Still, it was obvious he was heading for a crisis. She nipped into the bathroom to flush the toilet, then went back to the living room.

"One last thing, and then I'll go," she said. "If you get worried about stuff, if you feel threatened or weird? Call me, okay? I won't bug you. I just want you to be safe."

He closed his eyes and was still for a moment, then took a deep breath. "I'm not crazy. This is real. This is important."

"I know it's important, but you still have to take care of yourself. I think it would be a good idea to check in with your doctor again, actually, before the weekend starts."

"And I think it would be a good idea for you to leave. I need to get this done."

"Okay, but call me if you want to. At night, whenever."

He leaned forward and stared into his computer screen,

elbows on the desk, propping his head up at the temples with his splayed fingers, blocking her out.

As she left the building, she found Kyle steering his bike up the sidewalk, digging in his pocket for his keys. "Checking on Josh?" he asked.

"Yeah. He's not doing well."

"I know. I almost called you, but it hasn't been, like, an emergency. It's just . . . I've been trying to get him to hang out and stuff, but he says he doesn't have time. He hasn't been out of that apartment for days, and it's getting rank in there."

"He tells me he's working on a math paper."

"Some theory thing. He's all paranoid that somebody might steal his ideas. Last couple days, he's been looking at me funny. Like I'm the one he's worried about—which is crazy, because the stuff he's talking about is way over my head."

"That's part of his illness. It's hard for him to trust people when things get out of whack. Would you let me know if things get any worse? You can call me anytime."

He scrolled through his contacts. "Yep, got your number right here. Thing is . . . he gets pissed off so easy. Last time he was talking about killing people."

"He's never actually hurt anybody. He gets scared, though, and that might make him do something stupid. If anything he does concerns you, don't try to deal with it on your own. Call me."

He blew air out of his cheeks, relieved. "Gotcha."

"Will you be around this weekend?"

“Yeah. Well, except for a thing I was planning to go to Saturday night.”

“No need to change your plans. I’ll come back Monday morning to see if I can talk him into seeing his doctor, but meanwhile, let me know if you see him start acting like he did last time. Or anything that makes you nervous, just call.”

“Absolutely.”

She sat in her car and looked at her phone. She knew she’d have to call Donna, but she would freak out and demand that Anni take steps she couldn’t. Josh wasn’t yet in a state where he presented a danger to himself or others, the only conditions that triggered a non-voluntary hospitalization. She decided to stop by the university’s math department first, and dropped her phone back in her bag, relieved to have an excuse to put off the phone call.

It looked as if the entire campus had started the weekend early, but a poster taped to the door of Eckhart Hall advertising a Friday afternoon seminar series gave her hope that Dr. Lammert might be in the building. As she climbed to the second floor she heard a babble of voices echoing at the end of the darkened hall. Lammert was standing in a doorway, chatting with someone. He caught sight of her, wrapped up his conversation, then led her to his office. “Is Josh okay?”

“I think he’s in crisis, actually. I was wondering if you’ve talked to him lately.”

“Not in the past week.”

"I just stopped by his apartment. He's working on a problem he seems pretty excited about. One-third, two-thirds?"

"The one-third two-third conjecture? Huh."

"Is that a real thing?"

"It's real, just a little surprising. I didn't know he was interested in order theory."

"He thinks it's a breakthrough."

"Oh, lord."

"Yeah. Like before. And he's showing signs of paranoia."

Lammert winced. "Not good. We set up regular meeting times so he could work on his incompletes, but he canceled this week."

"Did he say why?"

"Just sent an email saying he wasn't coming. No explanation. I was hoping he'd be at the seminar this afternoon." He rubbed his forehead. "I guess it's not surprising that he didn't show. There was a bit of a scene last week. One of the other grad students said something that he took the wrong way. It got worse when one of the students made a phone call. For some reason, Josh thought he was calling the campus police and got agitated."

"Agitated how?"

"Tried to grab the guy's phone. He seemed okay once I got him into my office to talk about it, but if something like it happens again, if somebody calls security, he could get kicked out of the program for good."

"That would be hard on him."

"Devastating. He told me last week this is the only place

he ever felt safe. This whole thing is tragic. He's very bright. But the way things are going—well, the other students need to feel safe, too."

She made the call to Donna, and she reacted with typical melodrama. Anni talked her through it until her demands turned to tears and the tears to Donna's brand of positive thinking. Anni was surprised when it was over that the call had only lasted fifteen minutes. It felt like at least an hour.

Driving home, her phone rang, and Anni snatched at it. "Dinner, tomorrow," Nancy Tilquist said threateningly. "With your man, this time. "

"Oh, shit."

"What?"

"He can't. It's complicated."

"How bad is it?" Nancy asked quietly.

"He's on some task force that's sensitive and people think being with me might jeopardize an investigation. He's talking about resigning. I'm not going to let him do that, but for now, we have to keep our distance."

Nancy gave a short, sharp sigh in sympathy. "I still want you to come to dinner. How's your case coming along?"

"Which one?" Anni slowed for a group of students on Fraternity Row, spilling off the sidewalk, blocking the street with careless arrogance.

"How many do you have going?"

"Two, at the moment, not counting jobs I do for Thea

Adelman. One of my kids is getting ready for another trip to the hospital.”

“Oh, dear.” Nancy had been through it with her eldest daughter, Sophie.

“He’s not doing well. If things go south I may have to skip dinner, but let’s hope not. The other one, Feliks Król—I’m making some progress. One thing that’s weird, it turns out a guy I used to work with knew Król. I’m trying to get in contact, but I can’t find any trace of him.”

“Working undercover?”

“He’s not on the job anymore. He was in Boston three years ago.”

“Give me this fellow’s name. I have a friend in the criminology program at Northeastern who has done a lot of work with the Boston PD. He can tap his network.”

“That would be great.” Anni spelled it out for her. In reality, she doubted it would help. If information was so sensitive that Shirley wouldn’t share it with her, a nosy university professor wouldn’t get anywhere.

The next morning, Anni brewed coffee and took a mugful out onto the back porch. It was damp and chilly and the canvas sling chairs she and Dugan had sat in the previous evening were puddled with dew. She leaned on the balcony, looking down on her untended garden, random thoughts chasing each other in her head. She wondered what Dugan was thinking, whether Josh was having another imaginary infestation of bugs, what kind of religious fervor would drive Feliks Król to paint such obsessive scenes of violence.

She caught a movement out of the corner of her eye and realized the cat who lived in the back yard had ventured halfway up the steps, where he crouched, glaring at her. As soon as her head turned in his direction he darted lopsidedly down the steps and paused, his tail thrashing. She went inside to get the cat food. He made himself invisible behind the trash can while she filled his bowl. She left him to sneak out and scarf it down in secret as she left for a morning run.

After her usual circuit through the park, she turned east into Ukrainian Village. The tree limbs arching overhead were greening up with fat buds and the birds were making a racket as she jogged through the quiet residential streets. She turned on Paulina and slowed to a walk, looking for the house where Feliks Król has lived in early childhood. It was restored, now, and whoever lived in the basement flat had filled the paved area below the sidewalk with potted plants and expensive-looking wrought-iron lawn furniture bolted to the concrete. She rang the bell, but there was no answer.

She talked to a neighbor easing a designer stroller through a gate who pointed Anni to the home of the oldest resident on the block who in turn gave her the number of a former resident who might know Król. After getting voicemail and fruitlessly knocking on more doors, Anni headed toward the former boarding house where he'd irritated his housemates by cutting news stories about dead children out of the morning paper. As she approached, she saw a pigeon-toed child sitting on the front steps. She realized it was Linnea, Król's unlikely heir, cradling a mug between her hands, watching the big hairy dog snuffle around the clutter in the front yard. He squatted to pee beside the tipsy pink flamingo, then hopped up with a cheerful bark to greet Anni like an old friend, pushing his inquisitive nose through the gate. She let him sniff her fingers, then reached over to scratch behind his ears.

"How you doing?" Linnea asked.

"Fine. Just out for a run. Did you know that Feliks Król lived around the corner from here when he was little?"

"News to me. Hey, I just made coffee. You want some?"

"Sure."

Linnea unlatched the gate and led Anni into the house, down the front hall into the kitchen. The sink was full of dirty dishes. Glass jugs full of dark liquid crowded the counter, and bundles of dried plants hung from the ceiling. "Those are Melanie's," Linnea said. "She's an herbalist."

"And these?" Anni patted a jar full of cloudy liquid.

"I'm making kombucha. Well, I'm trying. Something went wrong with the last batch." She filled mugs with coffee. "Ben told me you're working on the project. He's really happy about it."

"Yeah, well. We'll see how it goes. Given how he's inventorying everything in Król's room, piece by piece, it's going to take forever to find out what's in there."

"He's pretty anal about it. How'd you find out where Feliks grew up?"

"I talked to Pat O'Hara, the other tenant who lived here. He liked Feliks. Thought he was a little eccentric, a little headstrong, but a good guy. He doesn't think there was anything funny about the feelings he had for kids."

"I could have told you that."

"He said Feliks left children presents. Didn't he do that for you, too?"

"Yup. I didn't know where they were coming from at first. I'd find things on my table, next to my shoes. Buttons and little china figurines, plastic flowers. Holy cards."

"You didn't think it was a little weird, having this stuff turn up like that?"

"Not really. When it started, there was a traveling kid staying here who was flirting a lot. I thought it was him. But he left and the little presents kept coming, so I realized it was Feliks."

"And that didn't seem strange? This old guy . . ."

"No, because he wasn't a creepy pedophile murderer. Those pictures? They're not about hurting kids. They're about being hurt. About being small and powerless."

"I wish it were that simple."

"Why shouldn't it be?" Linnea spoke with such certitude it made Anni feel old and jaded.

"In any case, I'm sure he left behind some trace of his past. It'll take years to uncover it, though, at the rate they're working."

"You want to look for yourself?"

"In Feliks's room?"

"Why not?"

"Well, Ben—"

"It's not his stuff. Feliks left it to me. You want to go look around?"

Anni took a sip of coffee. Her client, the man who was paying her wages, would be horrified. If she actually found something and took it to him, he'd probably fire her, whereas if she did it his way, she'd be pulling a nice part time salary for months. She swallowed the last of her coffee.

"Sure. Let's go."

Hours later, Anni's head was aching, her sinuses clogged with dust. Working her way through piles of stacked newspapers and magazines, she uncovered over a dozen notebooks filled with illustrated stories, six large paintings, and dozens of folded sheets of paper covered with Król's crabbed script, religious meditations that made no sense to her. She snapped photos with her phone until her battery ran low. She needed to keep it juiced enough to take calls in case Josh went off the rails. She stuck it in her pocket and asked Linnea for some paper and a pen to take notes.

Linnea took the top two feet of a stack and made herself comfortable in the old man's chair to sort through it, occasionally reading aloud from things she found—an advertisement for a patent medicine in an old magazine, a passage from a religious tract. Then, bored, she started going through boxes, trying on a woman's hat that had seductive black netting, finding another one that seemed to be made of bird wings—"eww, did people actually wear these?"—making little squeaks of pleasure as she burrowed around.

Ben Sidlo would be frantic if he knew Linnea was handling the precious records of his artist's life, but Anni was happy to have her company. Though the pictures and notebooks were as strange and disturbing as anything she'd seen and the crowded room triggered her claustrophobia, Linnea's delight reminded her of a child rummaging in an attic. When the girl read aloud from one of Król's notebooks, it seemed as if they had a ghostly child in the room with them, one who liked to

tell scary stories in the dark. When Anni pulled out a painting from the middle of a pile of papers, a gruesome scene in Król's weirdly whimsical style, Linnea laughed delightedly. "It's like one of those awful baroque paintings, piles of naked bodies and blood. I swear I've seen one like it in one of Feliks's books."

To Anni, it looked like an illustration from a quaint children's book that just happened to be about uniformed men butchering babies with swords and axes, watched by scandalized angels. She put it back carefully where she'd found it, under an old *Life* magazine from 1964 with a photo of G.I.s in a burning jungle on the cover.

"See? Here it is," Linnea said half an hour later. She had been sitting on the floor in a narrow space in front of the bookshelves, poring over books. She stood and propped an oversized volume open on top of a box. "Peter Paul Rubens, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, painted in sixteen something-something."

"You're right." It was uncannily like Król's painting.

"That's a story from the bible, right?"

"Yeah. If I remember right, King Herod had his soldiers massacre all the babies in Bethlehem because there was a prophecy or something."

"Oh, I remember that. Always seemed like bullshit that an angel would warn Mary and Joseph, but not the other kids' parents. I mean, seriously? Hey, I'm hungry, want something?"

"No." The thought of food made her stomach churn.

Linnea left. Anni kept working, mechanically searching through a seemingly unending mountain of material, each untouched pile beckoning as if Feliks's secrets were somewhere in there, always hiding in the next stack over.

When the girl returned she carried a tray with a teapot and mugs on it. For a moment Anni saw the scene as if illustrated as if by Król, a child in pigtails crouching down to have a tea party, sunlight streaming through a window tinting her hair with gold as ghouls and monsters gathered in the shadows, clinging to the cobwebs that laced the ceiling.

Anni stepped out of the dark room, blinking. She stretched and sneezed. "Whoa, I'm filthy."

"You've got . . ." Linnea reached up to Anni's hair. She held it up, a yellowed corner of newsprint. "It's a lot to go through, isn't it?"

"Too much."

Linnea filled two cups and they sat on the top of the stairs. "Are you looking for anything in particular?" she asked Anni.

"Not really. Well, sort of. I keep thinking I might find newspaper clippings about Danny. The police didn't find anything like that when they were here?"

"They looked kind of bummed, so I'm guessing they didn't."

Anni sneezed again.

They went back to work. Anni was absorbed in yet another illustrated notebook, this one about a street urchin who was put through an unending series of trials, always res-

cued in the nick of time by his guardian angel, when Linnea called out, “Hey, I think I found something.”

She held a wooden orange crate over her head as she snaked her way out of the maze made of boxes and stacks. Anni followed her out into the open space at the top of the stairs, where daylight spilled in through a window.

“There’s a bunch of personal stuff in here,” Linnea said. “Look. A report card from 1949. Feliks was in the fourth grade. He had U in everything. Unacceptable. Except in religion, and even that one says ‘needs improvement.’ Man, that sucks. They didn’t even spell his name right.”

Anni took the institutional card. Someone had charted the boy’s failings in perfect Palmer method script, adding in a note below, “Felix must pay better attention and stop fighting with the other boys.” Anni copied down the name and address of the school, printed in ornate scrollwork over its namesake—illustrated with a bloody heart ringed with thorns, a religious image that seemed to fit right in with Król’s grotesque world. “This might have been his orphanage.”

“He was in an orphanage?”

“After his mom got sick.”

Linnea held up a yellowed studio portrait of a woman with wavy hair massed around her shoulders and gaunt cheeks, “Beatrycze Król, 1938” scrawled across the back. “Could that be her?”

“Maybe. I have a phone number for a woman who might know.”

“Ooh! Call her.”

“My phone’s out of juice.”

“Use mine.”

Anni found the scrap of paper with the number on it and punched it in. After a few rings a woman answered in a scratchy, croaking voice. “Yeah?”

“Hi. My name’s Anni Koskinen, calling from Chicago. I was talking to an old neighbor of yours from Paulina Street, Damien? He told me you were the local historian.”

“Meaning I’m the old broad who lived there before all the yuppies moved in with their yoga mats and tofu. Best thing I ever did was sell that house. There’s loads to do here. We got riverboat gambling.”

“I was wondering if you knew some people who lived on that block in the 1940s.”

“Oh, probably. I’m older than dirt, and I spent my whole life on that block. Couldn’t believe how much people were willing to pay for it. Place was impossible to heat.”

“These people lived across the street from Damien in a basement flat. A woman with a child named Feliks.”

“When was this?”

“I don’t know exactly, but the early 1940s, I think. She got sick and the boy ended up in an orphanage when he was still small, possibly Sacred Heart on Pulaski. Her name might have been Beatrycze Król.”

“Oh.” The syllable faded out. “I do remember her. She didn’t have a husband. There was a lot of gossip. Word was, she had never been married. I remember saying to my mother once that I thought she was pretty. Well! You’d have thought

I said the devil had a handsome pair of horns on him. It wasn't easy for women back then."

"Did you know the boy?"

"I knew there *was* a boy. Hardly ever saw him, though. Those two kept to themselves. Unwed mothers faced a lot of shame."

"Do you know how old he was when his mother got sick?"

"Five or six, maybe? Sorry, that's all I know. Have fun tracing your family tree, honey. I have to get ready. The shuttle to the casino leaves in ten minutes."

Anni handed the phone back to Linnea. "That's his mom, all right."

"Wow." Linnea picked up the photo and studied it. "She looks tragic, doesn't she? I love her hair."

Anni sifted through the rest of the box's contents. If the materials had personal significance it was hard to tell. She straightened out rumpled piece of folded paper: a memorial pamphlet for a funeral of someone named Laurence Abbott held in the chapel at Elgin State Hospital in 1962.

"Mind if I use your phone to send myself some photos?" Anni asked.

"Go ahead. Then I'll put all this stuff back in its crate so Ben can discover it sometime next year and be all excited."

"How are you two getting along?"

"When I remind him this is all my stuff? We get along just fine."

Faron strolled past a row of gravestone, wishing he had worn a more comfortable pair of shoes. Though he lived not too far from this Boston cemetery, he didn't know it well. A vaguely paranoid impulse had led him to park some distance away from their meeting place. He stopped from time to time to study a headstone, using the pause to scan for followers, feeling simultaneously edgy and foolish. For cover, he carried a sheaf of flowers that he had bought at the grocery store along with the skim milk, pasta, olives, and lemons his wife had asked him to pick up on the way home. She would have raised an eyebrow at the flowers, a mix of wilted daisies and carnations dyed an unnatural shade of green. Lonnie being Lonnie, she would have thanked him for his thoughtfulness while slipping in a lecture about the environmental impact of importing flowers from Chile and the terrible working conditions for the women who earned next to nothing harvesting those very flowers. It was her little way of getting even

with him for being The Man. She may have fallen in love with someone who had the bad taste to wear a badge and a gun to work, but she didn't have to let him off easy.

He looked around, puzzled. Was he in the wrong section? The cemetery seemed designed to be confusing, with all the curving roads, the rows of gravestones looking too much alike. Then he turned full circle and spotted the angel on its plinth. As he headed toward it, he also saw Slovo, slipping out of the shadow of a mausoleum that looked like a gothic cottage turned to stone.

"Is this drama really necessary?" Faron asked him. He was looking a little raggedy, Faron thought, but then, he usually did.

"I thought you could use a little fresh air. Besides, it's more peaceful here than your office."

"Peace is overrated. What do you need?"

"Wondering what you've been hearing."

"About what?"

"Jesus, Faron. What's Maloney going to do?"

"You think anyone's going to tell me? I'm one of your known associates. They put me on burglaries. Way things been going, I'm just lucky I'm not back on patrol, busting up bar fights in Roxbury or some shit."

"Damn. Sorry. I didn't know."

"There seems to be a lot you don't know. Like where that star witness of yours is. Nobody knows, not even you, from what I hear. Is that true?"

"Depends on what the meaning of 'is' is."

"There you go, being your usual helpful self. How'd you let things get so complicated?"

"Wasn't my idea. This could have been simple."

Faron snorted. "Not when you're around. I should have known."

"I didn't mean to screw up your career."

"I'll survive. Don't know about you, though. Remember the good old days when you just had a bloodthirsty gang of East European mobsters after you? Now you got a U.S. attorney and two federal agencies riding your ass."

"Your tax dollars at work. You don't know anything, huh?"

"Not a damned thing. I can guess, though. Maloney would get a lot of entertainment value out of throwing you under the bus. He's pissed off that things didn't play out like they were supposed to. He had a sure thing, an easy way to score some points. Now, with Homeland Security breathing down his neck, he's losing face, and frankly? He blames you. For some strange reason, your personality rubs him the wrong way. Imagine that. I'd stay out of his way for a while if I were you."

"That can be arranged."

"Better yet, bring in your witness, get some actual cooperation going, and this whole thing could be turned around. That's assuming you haven't totally lost contact." He tried to read Slovo's expression. His friend had an abstracted look. "You listening to me at all?"

"Sorry, did you say something?"

“Motherfucker.”

Slovo gave him one of those cockeyed grins that suddenly made him look like an eight-year-old with a whoopee cushion.

“You want my advice?” Faron squatted down and propped his flowers against the angel’s plinth. They looked even shabbier against the polished stone. His knees creaked as he rose. “Go in on Monday ready to eat a big helping of humble pie. You have information they need.”

“And what happens to my witness?”

Faron spread his hands, making a point, but was suddenly aware that he was holding them, palms up, just like the angel, who watched them with a sad stone smile on her face. “You did what you could.”

“Not good enough. This is fucked up.”

“It’s how it is. No point in beating yourself up over it.” Faron put his hands against his spine and leaned back, trying to get a crick out. First his knees, then his back. Getting too old for this shit. “Say, you want to come over? Knock back a completely tasteless light beer, share our healthy cholesterol-free dinner? Lonnie’d love to see you.”

“Thanks, but I got stuff to do tonight.”

“Of course you do. Maybe when this is over then. Oh, there was one thing. Some woman’s trying to get hold of you.”

“Who’s that?”

“Cathy? Katie? From Chicago. I wrote it down.” He pulled a small notebook out of his breast pocket, flipped through

the pages, squinting, then fumbled for a pair of glasses. "It's in here, somewhere. This guy who teaches at Northeastern, sends students out to study us all the time, like we're an art farm or something? He was harassing everybody about it."

"Not Jeannie?"

"No, not your ex. I remember her, she's scary. It was somebody who knew you in Chicago. Now she's a college professor or something."

"Know what it's about?"

"Child support." He waited for a beat, enjoying the look on his friend's face before saying, "Just kidding. I got no idea. Wait, here it is. Looks like Annie something."

"Annie Moscovitz? Anna Jones?"

"Nope." He squinted. "Starts with a K and ends with something I can't read."

"Koskinen?"

"That could be. What kind of name is that, anyway? You know her?"

"Used to. It figures she'd end up at a university. Grew up on the North Shore, got promoted because of her connections. Being female, a minority, and cute didn't hurt, either."

"Was she one of your conquests?"

"Maybe. I didn't keep track."

"You dawg. Here's her number, anyway." He tore the sheet out of the notebook and handed it to him. "Want me to drop you somewhere?"

"No, I'm good."

"Sure?" When they'd first met, Slovo was recovering from

a cascade of injuries that left him with pieces of metal in his leg, a crutch to take the weight off, and a habit of chasing pain pills with whiskey. He still had a limp and on bad days used a cane. "Long walk to the T," Faron added.

"Who says that's where I'm headed?" All prickly and suspicious suddenly.

"Hey, relax. I just figured—" He broke off as Slovo gave him one of those grins. Just fooling. "Whatever. No need to tell me what craziness you're up to. Just do me a favor and keep out of trouble." He punched Slovo's shoulder, maybe a little harder than he had to, then headed for his car, thinking that short walk was plenty far enough. His feet hurt. He looked forward to being home in his chair with a beer in his hand, Lonnie next to him with her glass of white wine, her egghead NPR news station telling them in a familiar comfortable patter all the shit gone wrong with the world that day.

"Hey Faron?" Slovo called out as he reached his car. "Give Lonnie my love."

"Will do."

As he dug his car keys out of his pocket, Faron turned to look back, but the angel was standing all by herself, arms raised as if to say "what can you do?" Slovo had melted away in that sneaky cat-like way he had.

Returning home, Anni updated her notes, downloaded her photos, and studied them. Beatrycze Król, with her gaunt cheeks and cloud of dark, wavy hair. A blurry snapshot with “Feliks” penciled across the back in spidery cursive, showing a baby standing in a crib, holding onto the bars and peering through them like a tiny, solemn convict. A fuzzy photo of a group of boys in uniforms, their hair cropped so short it was nearly shaved, lined up on the steps of a brick building watched over by a nun in full habit, a bundle of keys hanging at her side. Anni wondered which one was the unsatisfactory boy who needed improvement in religion.

She caught sight of the time. Dammit, running late for dinner.

Anni parked in front of the house, behind the familiar battered Volvo that Nancy had been driving for more than a decade. It had acquired some new dents and scrapes, thanks

to Sophie, who had passed her driver's test but hadn't totally gotten the hang of it yet.

Sophie greeted her at the door and pulled her into the kitchen, eager to show off the quiche she had made while simultaneously complaining about her required science course. "Why should I have to take biology again? I had it in high school."

"You could have taken something else," Nancy said, taking the bottle of wine Anni had brought.

"What, chemistry? *Physics*? I'm going to major in art. I don't need science. I got a D on the first test." She sounded proud of it. "Worst score in the whole class. What do you think of the crust?"

"It's beautiful," Anni said, truthfully, admiring the fluted edging.

"You should have seen the mess she made," Alice said. "Looked like a flour sack exploded."

"I cleaned it up."

"Last time you didn't. I got stuck doing it."

"Can I show you my volcano?" Lucy tugged at Anni's shirt as the girls bickered. "I can make it erupt."

"No," Nancy said firmly.

"Talk about a mess," Alice muttered.

"But it's so cool," Lucy squealed. "It shoots up in the air!"

"How'd you make this volcano?" Anni asked.

"With candy and diet pop." Lucy folded over with laughter. "It exploded!" She demonstrated, with her arms stretched toward the ceiling, adding sound effects.

"It's your turn to set the table, Luce," Nancy said calmly.

"Don't set a place for me," Sophie said. "I have to meet Lucas. That play, remember?"

"That's not until eight."

"We want to get good seats."

Nancy glanced at the clock. "You have a few minutes, anyway. Anni wanted to talk to you about Dr. Sidlo. There's an artist he's been researching."

"Oh, yeah. Ben's so excited about that guy." She absently broke off a piece of the crust and popped it into her mouth.

"You took a class from him, I heard."

"Contemporary Art and Theory. It's a three hundred, so I had to get permission, but it was awesome, which is why I want to major in art. Or maybe Theatre, with a minor in arts management. Ben's a great teacher, though sometimes he doesn't stop when class is over. He gets so wound up that he just keeps going. I had Spanish right after, but it was really awkward to get up and leave, even though I had to get all the way across campus and my Spanish teacher was, like, really strict about everything. What's the deal with this artist, anyway? Was he a pedophile? His stuff is so creepy, but you'd think he was Leonardo da Vinci, the way Ben talks about him."

"I guess that kind of art is his specialty. Outsider art. He wrote a book about it."

"Figures. I liked his course, but he's so into himself it's kind of gross. I gotta go. Can I take the—"

"No."

"You didn't let me even finish my sentence."

"I don't like you driving in the city, especially at night."

"Jeez."

"Did you put mushrooms in this?" Alice poked at the quiche. "You know I hate mushrooms."

After dinner, the women lingered at the kitchen table, finishing a bottle of wine. "How ridiculous. Dugan's a good cop. It's an insult to suggest he can't keep the details of a case confidential."

"I don't know what they're investigating but it's political dynamite and one of the people involved has a connection to a case I worked on. The reality is, I'm the last person he should be with."

"They shouldn't hold it against him that you occasionally work for a lawyer who keeps suing them."

Anni gave her a crooked smile. "It's not that, and you know it. I'm a liability. You don't shack up with someone who disgraced the badge." Nancy started to object, but Anni cut her off. "That's how they see it. You don't rat out a fellow cop. You just don't."

"Which is why citizens don't trust the police. No accountability."

"Dugan's not like that."

"Neither were you. But that culture is toxic. How does Dugan cope?"

Anni shrugged. Though she sometimes wondered that

herself, she was ready to change the subject. "Say, don't tell Ben Sidlo, but I was going through Feliks Król's stuff today."

"Why shouldn't I tell him?"

"He wants to control who has access and how everything is handled. It's fine with him if it takes years to get through it all. Gives him more time to build up his reputation, and he wants to control what he calls his media message."

"Hard on Danny's family, though."

"On the mom, yeah. The dad's just like Ben, enjoying all the attention."

"I've seen him on television. What a git. Did you find anything?"

"A few bits and pieces. I thought might find something about Danny, but nothing has turned up yet."

"I passed along that name you gave me to my colleague in Boston. He's already been tapping his contacts."

"Thanks. It's weird. While I was trying to trace Slovo, I found out all kinds of things I didn't know, but nothing about where he is now." She recapped her search so far as Nancy refilled their glasses.

"How strange. You never knew he had brothers?" Nancy asked.

"He only talked about his grandmother. Not sure how you make dementia funny, but he did."

"Oh dear."

"It sounds awful, but it was kind of touching. She didn't speak much English, so he'd had to interpret for her at the nursing home. She died right around the time I got to Harri-

son. He was really upset about it. I assumed she was the only family he had.”

“But the one brother, the oldest one, he lives in Chicago?”

“He seems like a nice guy. Teaches social studies at a Catholic high school. From what I can tell, they had a pretty messed-up childhood. Their dad died when they were small and their mother had a crummy job that didn’t pay enough to feed five kids. Another brother, one who lives in California now, he told me she was abusive and Slovo got the worst of it. He ran away and was a street kid for a while, which explains a lot. I mean, he was always goofing around, like a clown with anger issues, but he didn’t socialize after work. Even when he was working, he kept his own hours and did his own thing.”

“A man of mystery.”

“More than I ever realized. It turns out that Dugan grew up with the detective who got killed the night Slovo was wounded. They were close family friends.”

“Jim didn’t know her, but we went to her funeral.” There was a brief silence while they both remembered another funeral that was a sea of uniforms, hundreds of officers showing solidarity. The sound of bagpipes.

“Your other case,” Nancy said briskly. “The boy who’s headed to a crisis. How’s he doing?”

“I haven’t talked to him today.” Her hand reached for her phone automatically. No new messages. “He’s not a boy anymore, he’s a graduate student. He’s the one tried to go to Argentina.”

“I remember that. Those poor parents.”

"They disagree about what to do. His mother is over-involved. His father is ready to wash his hands of him."

"That poor kid."

They finished the bottle as they talked, then Anni headed to campus to spend the rest of the evening with her brother. They were watching a documentary about bees on the Discovery Channel in companionable silence when her phone rang. She frowned at the number. It wasn't anyone in her contacts, but the area code seemed vaguely familiar. She'd used it not long ago, she realized, calling people in the Boston PD, trying to get a bead on Slovo.

"Yes?" she said, rising and taking her phone to the hallway outside her brother's studio apartment.

"You've been asking about me."

No hello, just the sharp edge of suspicion. "Is this Slovo? Uh, yeah, thanks for getting in touch."

"What do you need?" There were echoing sounds in the background. Voices bouncing off hard surfaces. A radio playing in the background.

"I wanted to ask you about Feliks Król."

"Feliks?" His tone thawed. "Wow. Been a while. How's he doing?"

"I'm afraid he died last January."

"Shit. What happened?"

"It was pneumonia."

"Damn. I guess he was getting on in years."

"Sorry to drop the news on you like that. So, you knew him pretty well?"

"What's this about?" The warmth had left his voice as abruptly as it had come.

"I don't know if you remember the Danny Truscott case."

"Sure. The one you caught. I heard they found some evidence."

"Danny's shirt and shoes. They were in Król's room."

"In . . . Sorry, it's noisy here. What was that?"

"Feliks Król had some of Danny's clothes in his room."

"No. What I heard, it was some crazy artist."

"That's Król. His room was full of paintings and drawings. Nobody knew until he died and they went to clear out his room."

Slovo didn't respond for a moment. "He was an artist?"

"Yes. Experts think his work is pretty important."

"Huh. Well, if you're thinking Feliks did something to the kid, forget it. That's not possible."

"The subject matter of the art is violent and disturbed. His pictures, they all involve children. I'm just trying to piece this together."

"Maybe he picked the clothes up somewhere. Maybe even the art. He did a lot of scavenging."

"No. I was in his room. There was a project he was working on, half finished. It was inspired by a newspaper story about an abused child. He has dozens of these notebooks. He was obsessed."

"You have this all wrong." He sighed impatiently. "People thought he was a little weird, okay? But I knew the guy,

knew him for years. There's no way he—fuck. I'll call you later."

"I'm sorry if . . ." Her phone beeped three times and she looked at it. He'd hung up on her.

She paced up and down the hallway, thinking. She should have handled it differently. Slovo was upset enough to learn Król had died, then learned he had led a secret life. But clearly he knew the man, knew him well enough to care about his reputation. Enough to be completely thrown to learn he might, after all, have had an unhealthy interest in children. She would give him time to collect his thoughts before calling him back.

She only had the patience to give it a minute before redialing. "This is Zoya." A quavering, elderly voice answered.

"Um . . . I was trying to reach Konstantin Slovo."

"The young man? He's your friend?"

"We used to work together. Is he around?"

"Let me check." Anni waited. "No, he's not here anymore." The background noise had increased, voices raised, echoing and confused. "Hey, watch out, mister. What's your hurry? Idiots. Wait one moment please." The sounds grew muffled and a few seconds later were replaced by the sound of tires on pavement, city street noises. "Okay, is better now. Every time I stop in to get milk or cigarettes, some drama is happening at this store. So, you are also translator? *Govoritze po Russkie? Po Ukrainskie?*"

"Sorry?"

"Spanish, then? You said you work with him."

“Uh, that was a long time ago. I was just trying to call him back. Do you know how I can reach him?”

“Sorry, I don’t even know his name. Nice boy. Twice he help me with some papers. They send me documents in the mail that I don’t understand, they make no sense. So sure, I let him use my phone, no problem. Such good manners he has. His Russian is a little terrible, to be honest, but don’t tell him I said so. Instead, you say Zoya sends greetings, okay?”

“I will,” Anni said, and went back to watch a show with her brother, trying to make sense of it all while on the television screen bees swarmed together like an ominous and highly organized ball of humming menace.

When her phone rang in the dark, she immediately thought of Dugan and snatched it up, picturing flashing red and blue lights in the night, the sound of sirens before she remembered he was serving on a task force, not working on the street.

“Anni?”

“Hi, Josh.” She flopped back onto her pillow. “What’s up?”

“I’m in trouble. I think I may have killed somebody. But I don’t remember doing it.”

“Yeah? Where are you?”

“I don’t want to say. They may be listening.”

“What makes you think you killed someone?”

“The blood on my shoes, for one thing.”

She sat up on the edge of the bed and switched on a lamp.
“Whose blood? Josh?”

“I don’t know. There were too many people, and they were all yelling at me. I might have killed a bunch of them.”

“Are you hurt?”

“No.”

“So, what’s the thing about blood?”

“You think I’m making it up.”

“Josh, listen. You probably didn’t kill anyone, okay? I’d like to come and get you, though. So let me know where you are and—”

“I can’t! They’ll hear. Don’t you get it?”

“Okay, let’s figure out a place to meet. Tell me in code, okay? A place we both know. Give me a hint, and get there as fast as I can.”

“They’ll be watching.”

“I’ll be careful. I’ll make sure nobody follows me.”

“Oh, god, the phone. Shit! They’ll have my location.”

“Wait. Don’t turn off—hey, Josh?”

He was gone. She checked the time: 3:24 a.m. She rubbed her face and reached for a pair of jeans.

As she headed toward the South Side, she hunted for Kyle’s contact. His phone rang twice before he answered. “Hi, Kyle. It’s Anni Koskinen, Josh’s friend. Look, I’m sorry to—”

“Anni? Oh, man. Is Josh with you?”

“No. What’s wrong?”

“The cops are looking for him.”

“What happened?”

“He stabbed Pete. This guy, Pete Foster. He’s dead. He died. He was laying right there in all this blood, and we called for an ambulance, but he fucking *died*.” His voice was rising

as he spoke, ending on a scratchy note of outrage and disbelief.

“Are you at your apartment?”

“No. I’m at Devon’s place.”

“The police are there?”

“They just got here. I can’t believe Pete’s dead. I mean, I was just talking to him. This can’t be real.”

“Where’s Devon’s place?”

“I don’t know the address.” Kyle sounded angry, but he was sobbing, too, enraged by the unfairness of it all.

“No problem. Just give me the cross streets, okay? I’m on my way.”

As she headed for her car, she scrolled through her contacts on her phone until she found the number for the McLaren’s landline, took a deep breath, then pushed the button. After three rings she heard the receiver picked up clumsily, the clearing of a throat. “Yes?”

“Mr. McLaren, it’s Anni Koskinen. Sorry to wake you up, but your son’s been involved in an incident.” She started her car as she spoke and pulled out into the quiet street.

“What now?”

“It’s serious. A man has been stabbed. From what I can tell witnesses identified your son as the assailant. The police are looking for him.”

“Good god almighty.” He groaned the words, sounding weary. “Who got hurt?”

She could hear Donna in the background. "What is it? George?" Her muffled voice sounded jagged.

"I'm not sure. Sounds like another college student."

"How bad is he?"

"He died."

She heard him take a deep breath, then let it out slowly.

"Great. Fucking great."

Donna's voice grew louder, hoarse with panic. "George, what *is* it?" He apparently muffled the receiver against his chest. Anni could only hear the low drone of his words and high-pitched sounds from Donna. His voice grew louder and Anni could make out some his words: "I've been telling you—" and finally, clearly, "Jesus, Donna, get a grip" as he lifted the receiver from his chest. "I'm calling our lawyer." He disconnected. Anni dropped her phone into her lap and drove south.

The street was full of flashing lights. Anni made her way through a crowd gathered near the yellow tape blocking off the front lawn of a big Victorian house. "Who's running the show?" she asked a uniformed officer, who ignored her. "I have something for him. I know the suspect."

"Tell me what you got, I'll see if somebody's free."

"Not out here." A couple of reporters had already found their way to the front of crowd, leaning over the tape to film the scene with their phones while asking bystanders what they knew.

The cop turned away, keyed his shoulder mike and mut-

tered something. After five-minute wait, his radio crackled and he lifted the tape a few inches and jerked his head. She ducked under and headed for the porch, where she was met by a detective she recognized, vaguely, though she couldn't remember his name. He nodded his recognition but blocked the way with his bulk and authority, looking down at her from the top of the steps.

"I hear you're looking for Josh McLaren," she said.

"Know where he's at?"

"Not yet. He has a mental illness, schizophrenia. I just talked to him on the phone. He's having a psychotic episode."

"No kidding. You know where he's at?"

"He hung up before I could find out. Check with the U of C cops. He's a grad student there. I want to help look for him. What can you give me?"

"I need a few minutes here, and then we'll talk."

"I'll be by my car." She gestured down the block, past the growing crowd.

Twenty minutes later, he strolled up to where she leaned against her car, neatly evading the two network crews that were setting up lights, getting ready to tape news segments. He was squinting at a pack of gum, trying to grasp the little red cellophane tab to open it. When he got it open, he tipped it her way politely. She shook her head. "Sorry for the wait, but you know how it is." He slipped a stick of gum out of the package and unwrapped it. "So, how do you know this kid?"

"I work for his parents." She pulled out her wallet to show

him her license. "Sometimes they need someone to go looking for him in places they wouldn't think of."

He looked at her license and his eyes flicked up at her before he handed it back. "Such as?"

"First time they called me in, I caught up with him in that railyard south of Midway. He was trying to get to South America. That was really important, for some reason. Last time, back in March, I found him on Promontory Point, down on the rocks. He told me he had killed six people, which he hadn't. When he's delusional, he says stuff like that. You think he actually killed somebody?"

"Does he have a history of violence?"

"No."

"You spoke to him on the phone?"

"Got a call around three thirty. He was scared, wouldn't tell me where he was. His phone's turned off now. He was afraid someone might use the GPS to track him. He gets paranoid like that."

"What exactly did he say?" She didn't answer right away. "Look, if you're trying to protect—"

"No. I'm just trying to remember. Most of the time when he tells me he killed somebody, he sounds really sure of himself. This time he just seemed confused."

"Did he say—"

"He said he had blood on his shoes and there were a lot of people around. He thought maybe he had killed somebody, maybe more than one, but he didn't remember doing it. He's never said that before."

“Before? This happens a lot?”

“Look, he’s never been violent. Not once. He just gets these ideas.”

“Is he off his meds?”

“I checked in on him on Friday. Far as I could tell, he was taking them and checking in with his psychiatrist regularly, but I could see he wasn’t doing well.”

“Who’s his psychiatrist?”

She gave him her name and the name of her practice. “Another person he might turn to is a math professor at the University, John Lammert. He lives in a townhouse not too far from here.” He wrote down his phone number. “I already alerted Josh’s parents. They were going to call their lawyer.” She gave him their phone number and address. He raised his eyebrows as he jotted it all down in a small notebook. “They have a lot of money,” she said.

“That’s just fabulous,” he mumbled, shaking his head.

She dialed Kyle’s number and left a message asking him to call her. Then she checked Twitter. Messages about Pete Foster were flooding in. Word of his death was spreading, though Josh’s name wasn’t coming up. Most of the messages expressed shock and sorrow; a few seemed to assume a mugging or carjacking had happened and blamed the neighborhood surrounding the university, using the word “thug” for shorthand.

For the next two hours she drove the streets, walked the U of C campus, and jogged along the lake shore from Promon-

tory Point to the far side of the neighboring beach. She had plenty of company. Police cars were prowling Lakeshore Drive and creeping along neighborhood streets, directing their alley spotlights to the sides. As she returned to her car, the beats of a helicopter drummed overhead with a searchlight probing the streets.

Great, she thought. He'll be even more freaked out.

The McLaren's lawyer called her to ask what she knew and what steps she was taking to locate their son. He sounded like the kind of attorney who was on a first-name basis with city officials and the brass. She hoped he could impress on them that Josh was confused and frightened and could be taken down without using force. Of course, the victim's family probably had well-connected lawyers applying just as much pressure from the other side.

As she trekked to every place she could think of where Josh might have gone to ground, she knew it was an impossible task. There were two huge parks near the university, a rail yard and a good-sized cemetery within reach, not to mention derelict properties awaiting the bulldozer just blocks from the ritzy neighborhood where Kyle's friend Pete was stabbed. The boundary between wealth and poverty was razor-thin in this part of town. She stopped at a McDonald's to refuel with coffee and an egg sandwich and gather her thoughts.

The South Side wasn't her home territory, and she had only a handful of contacts to tap. They weren't too happy to be woken up so early, but she had to get the word out. She tripled the amount of money she'd offered in the past for tips.

The McLarens could afford it. Like an emergency phone tree, her contacts would spread the word in a net across the neighborhoods, a competition to see who could collect the cash first.

But the first call she got was from a reporter.

“So, I hear one of your kids gutted a guy with a kitchen knife,” Az Abkerian greeted her.

“I’m pretty sure I know less about it than you do. Who’s the guy who got stabbed?”

“Peter Nicholas Foster, son of a finance heavyweight and member of the Commercial Club, same as your kid’s dad. Found deceased at the residence of Devon Oachs, whose parental units move in the same social circles. Both Foster and Oachs are enrolled at the U of C B-school, studying how to get richer. This is going to blow up big, you know. Rich people’s kids killing each other—this’ll go national. Got anything you can tell me?”

“Just that I won’t confirm that I work for the McLarens. And that if you drag me into this story I’ll never speak to you again.”

“But you did work for the McLaren’s in the past, right?” He waited. “Whatever. You can have what I got anyway, ‘cause I’m a nice guy. Dispatcher took the call at 3:19 A.M. The victim was . . . did you say something?”

“No.” She jotted the time down and checked her recent call history. That was just minutes before Josh had called her.

After a weighty pause, hoping for her to drop a useful tidbit, Az went on. “The victim had been stabbed in the chest

with a big old kitchen knife. It hit something important and he bled out before the ambo arrived.”

“Just one wound?”

“What I was told, though I gotta confirm it. Police have four witnesses independently saying your boy did it. Apparently he showed up at an informal gathering of friends without an invite, acting strange. Accused them of stealing some idea of his. They tried to calm him down but he grabbed the knife and boom.”

“Dammit.”

“Does this sound like something Joshua McLaren would do? What kind of previous relationship did he have with the dead guy? They have a history?”

“You know I’m not going to answer that.”

“Don’t you want to help people understand his state of mind before this story goes live?”

“Nice try. Does this mean you’re working again?”

“Freelancing in the gig economy. ‘Working’ pays better, but I’ll take what I can get. Look, you know Josh better than most. He’s coming off like a dangerous killer, right now. I could use a little something to balance perspectives. Not for attribution, of course.”

“Quit it.”

“On background, then.”

“Az—”

“Fine, fine. Some friend you are. I gotta go.”

He acted mad, but from his tone she could tell he was as happy as a dog that had just rolled on a smelly carcass, a nice

change from the way he sounded when he was hungover from holding a wake for the end of his career. But it was also a reminder that the vast number of cops searching for Josh would be more than matched by a horde of journalists, hungry for a sensational story. She downed her coffee and headed for her car.

It was close to noon before she found him.

A few tips had come in, but none of them had paid off. She'd finally picked up the trail herself from an elderly woman out sweeping her sidewalk. A white boy had woken her up in the middle of the night. "These college kids don't have no consideration, and they drink way too much. He was shouting things, clothes all messed up, causing a commotion. Took off running." She pointed the way.

She got another sighting from a man sitting on his stoop. He'd seen him, too. Running and looking over his shoulder, like he was being chased by Mister Nobody. Ran right into the park. Jackson Park. Five hundred acres of fields, woods, boat docks, and lagoons.

"Great," Anni muttered to herself.

She drove the looping road that circled through the park, seeing nothing but the usual: families, runners, dog walkers, old folks enjoying the sun. Two men were putting lawn chairs and fishing gear into the trunk of a car in a parking lot behind the Museum of Science and Industry. She showed them a picture of Josh on her phone. "You see this guy come by here? I told his mama I'd try to find him."

"Sure did. We were just getting set up when he come running by. That was 'bout, what, two hours ago?"

"Something like that." His friend nodded.

"We were fishing in the lagoon. He came crashing through the bushes. Looked kind of dazed."

"Dazed and confused," his friend said.

"Looked like he'd been in a fight."

"We asked if he needed help," his friend said, "but he looked at us like they do."

"Like we dangerous." They both laughed at the idea. Two old Black men trying to catch a few fish.

"Did he say anything?" Anni asked.

"Nothing that made any sense. He took off running that way." He pointed.

"To the island?"

"I didn't see. I got a bite just then."

"Got a *boot*, you mean. Hooked some trash," his friend said.

She gave them her cards, asked them to call if they saw him again. Then she headed for the island.

It would appeal to Josh as a hiding place, wooded and overgrown, full of dense thickets even in the early spring. She jogged across the bridge and down a potholed path, scanning side to side. A family cycled past, the youngest tilting on training wheels. A man walking his dog looked at the photo she showed him but shook his head. She reached the far end of the island and stopped to talk to two old men on a bench.

"What he do?"

"The police think he might have stabbed somebody," Anni said.

"Is that right? Heard a lot of sirens last night. Up there." He pointed his chin north, toward the enclave where the rich folks lived.

"He has a mental illness. He's probably scared right now and acting weird, though he never hurt anyone before."

They looked at each other, then one of them pointed. "That tree over there? The big one? He's back in there."

Anni saw nothing but greenery and tangled branches. "You saw him?"

"'Bout an hour ago, maybe two, he come running up the path. Saw us sitting here and stopped. Looked like he was crying."

"Said 'I'm sorry' like ten times," his companion added.

"Wasn't carrying no knife, though." He glanced at the other man who nodded in confirmation. "Ran off, hunkered down by that tree. Hasn't moved since."

"Thanks. I'm going to see if I can talk to him. You might want to clear out, just in case."

"No ma'am. This here's our bench." They both chuckled. "Come here most days when it's fine, but it ain't usually exciting."

"Fine," she muttered and pushed into the thicket. She saw Josh huddled against the tree trunk, arms locked around his knees, head tucked down. His hair was laced with twigs and dead leaves, bare feet scratched and muddy.

“Josh, it’s me,” she said softly. He made a low moan and clenched himself tighter. “My car’s not far from here.”

“They’re going to shoot me.” His words were muffled and hoarse. “I killed them all. I had to.”

She felt a wave of weariness. “Let’s go to the hospital. I know you don’t like it there, but you’ll be safe and—”

She wasn’t ready for him when he sprang up and shoved her, sending her sprawling. He stumbled deeper into the woods, thrashing through the thicket like a blind, lame animal. She scrabbled for her phone and the detective’s card, trying to keep a visual on Josh as she made the call.

“I found Josh McLaren. He’s on the island in Jackson Park. Unarmed, barefoot. Headed east through the woods. Oh, shit.” A vine had caught her ankle. She went sprawling and lost her phone. She scrabbled through the undergrowth to find it.

“Where’s he at now?” The detective’s voice was as calm and steady as a dispatcher’s, though she sensed the electric hum of the search in the background, orders being relayed, cars redirected to converge on the park.

“He just made it to the footpath. Running north, now, toward the museum.” She was panting, one eye watering after getting slapped by a twig. “He’s unarmed and he’s scared. Try not to hurt him.”

She was on the path now, just yards behind him. He stopped short as a cruiser rumbled across the pedestrian bridge onto the island and squealed to a stop, blocking the way. Another car came up from behind. In minutes he was ringed

by police. Josh's head swiveled from side to side, his eyes fixed on the drawn guns. A brawny uniformed officer spoke slowly and calmly. "It's all right son. Nobody's going to harm you if you do what we say."

Josh stared at him, hunched and visibly trembling, his eyes wide with terror. There were scratches on his cheek like claw marks. The twigs and leaves tangled in his hair made him look like a feral child. For a moment Anni saw him as Feliks Król might have drawn him, an innocent child circled by armed men bent on violence.

Anni caught the officer's eye, signaling that she wanted to approach him. "Josh, it's going to be all right," Anni said gently. She stepped forward, her palms open, moving slowly. "It's okay." Another step.

"Anni?" It sounded as if he were pleading. The same voice as her brother when he was so lost and terrified he spoke her name aloud, squeezing the syllables out as if it hurt.

"They won't hurt you, I promise." She had to believe it so that she could make him believe, too, in spite of the guns, in spite of the tight ring of tension surrounding them.

"You're not Anni. You're one of them."

"No, I'm the same old Anni. We're going to be fine, Josh, okay? We'll go together."

He stared at her as she took a step closer. She had a weird thought that if she took hold of the trailing bramble caught in his hair, dangling down over his shoulder, she could lead him to safety.

That's when he punched her in the face.

“I’m fine,” she said, pressing a cold pack to her left eye, fighting off fatigue. The chair in the interview room was hard, the fluorescent lights overhead too bright.

“Should have left it to us. You sure you don’t want medical attention?”

“He doesn’t know how to throw a punch.” She heard his howl again as they took him down, a scrum of men piling on top of him as he bucked and flailed. “You charging him for Pete whatever-his-name-is?”

“Foster. Pete Foster.” The detective she’d spoken to earlier scratched his head, sighed. “Got work to do first. A scene to process, witnesses to interview, statements from the neighbors. I’m up to my ass in high-priced attorneys. Right now, the kid’s in the hospital. A nice one, not the one at the jail. The ASA wasn’t too happy about it, but the parents raised a ruckus. He’s locked up safe and comfortable while we figure out our next steps.”

“Watch out for his mom. She’ll give you a lecture about mental illness and then ask you to buy tickets to some fundraiser.”

He chuckled. “Maybe later. Right now she’s pretty upset. Crying her eyes out, but angry, too. I thought she might give her husband a shiner to rival yours. She’s so certain her boy wouldn’t hurt anybody. The dad, he’s not so sure. As for me . . . look, let’s be frank, here. You deal with these situations enough, you got a feel for it. You’ve seen Josh McLaren in a state like this before. He told you he killed somebody. That he had to.”

“He said ‘I killed them all.’ That’s delusional thinking.”

“He’s delusional all right. But it happens that way sometimes, right? He told two gentlemen out there on that island he was sorry. You got an illness like that, sometimes a voice in your head says you gotta do some act of violence.”

“In the past, his voices told him he’s no good, he’s the one who doesn’t deserve to live.”

“Maybe this time they started telling him different.”

“He’s never been violent before.” As Anni heard herself say it yet again, the words sounded worn, polished smooth, as if she had rubbed them together too many times and they slipped out of her tired grasp to lie there between them, meaningless.

“Doesn’t mean it couldn’t happen,” the detective said gently after seconds had ticked by. He sounded tired too. “Apparently he thought somebody was stealing some new invention of his. A genius idea that was going to make him rich and

famous. When your mind's in a state like that, your thoughts out of control, you try to explain it to people, you start arguing, the guy maybe makes fun of you or something. I mean, let's face it, these were college boys having a party. Wasn't nobody in that room hadn't had a few beers, some weed. Probably treated him like it was a big joke. That wouldn't have helped any."

"Where would he have he gotten the weapon?"

"It was just a knife from the kitchen."

"He went into the kitchen to find it?"

"Naw, it was laying around. They cooked a frozen pizza, I guess, left the knife among all the empties and burnt-out Js. Weapon was right there."

She could picture it. The taunts, Josh's anxious fury, the voices in his head chattering away, an impulsive moment he couldn't take back. "Nobody else was hurt?"

"One of them got a black eye. Another one cut himself on some glass. In the confusion, they were tripping over themselves, scared to death. But he just put the knife in the one guy and ran off. All of this is independently confirmed by multiple wits."

"Foster was stabbed just the once?"

"All it took." The detective gave her a look, waggled a finger. "I know what you're thinking. Where's the frenzy? Where's the craziness? But my guess, this is how it happened." He looked up at the ceiling and squinted, concentrating, as if someone had scrawled a message up there explaining it all. "He was in a situation that was stressing him out, get-

ting scared, hearing these voices that were telling him you gotta do this, go on, *do it*.” He closed his eyes, feeling it, making Anni feel it. “But he didn’t really want to and when it happened, when he saw the reality of what he’d done, all the blood, he took off, wishing it never happened.”

He sat back in his chair, rubbed his eyes wearily. “I get what you’ve been saying. This is not a violent guy. And I know the stats, cause his momma told me like ten times: crazy people are way more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. But the fact is, it happens. You know it does. They don’t mean to, but things get all messed up in there and . . .” He waved his hands around his head, fingers like evil spirits fluttering around him. “They push somebody off a platform in front of a train. Hold their baby’s head under the water in the bath. Hit their grandma with an ax. Boom. It’s done. It’s a damned shame, cause they ain’t in their right mind, but it happens. You know it does.”

She shook her head, though she knew he was right.

“You want to try and convince me someone else did this?”

“No. I just don’t . . .” She finished her sentence with a shrug.

“We’re going to investigate all the possibilities. So many lawyers around, kind of hard to get a word in edgewise, but we’ll do it right. You got to trust me on this. I don’t cut corners, especially when everything we do could be put on *48 Hours* or some such. But I gotta tell you, I was in that room. It’s pretty clear how things went down.”

She nodded dully.

"At least you made sure he didn't hurt anybody else or get himself killed. And none of our officers had to resort to force. All these lawyers circling like buzzards, that's a big relief, even if it came at the cost of a pop in the face." He squinted at her. "How's that eye?"

"It's nothing." She put the ice pack down, so tired she no longer knew what she was saying.

"We got this, now. It'll take us a while to sort it all out, but we will." He chuckled to himself. "Got to give his mom points for effort. She's demanding we find out which of the brothers did it. Must have been one of them gang members, not her sweet little boy."

"Shit."

"That's okay. She's his mother. She's supposed to take his side. Girl, you go home, get some sleep. We can get something more official from you later. Appreciate you helping us out with this." She felt a card pressed into her hand. "Let me find somebody to get you to your car. You okay to drive?"

She sat in her car, her phone in her hand, thumb poised on the familiar number, something she had done without thinking. She couldn't call Dugan. She couldn't invite herself over to his place for the night. She couldn't lean into that familiar shoulder and feel the world settle slowly into a regular pattern as steady as his heartbeat, not for weeks and weeks.

Ever since the uniformed officer showed where to sit and wait, waves of fatigue had been breaking over her, their undertow dragging her into the same place again and again,

a dark, despairing place where she questioned her decisions and imagined all the things she could have done differently to prevent that moment when Josh had grabbed up a knife and ended a life. At least the detective—Det. Elijah Morton, it said on the card she still had clutched in one hand—had been decent. She didn't envy him, having to deal with all those entitled parents and their high-powered lawyers, not to mention the mayor's office and the press. The story the evidence told might be clear and simple, but every step he took would be scrutinized, and she knew how that felt.

It didn't help, having been in such a familiar setting, waiting her turn with the other civilians. She had felt that electric charge in the air, the one that comes when you knew this one would be on the front page tomorrow, would make neighbors ask about it. "Hey, that thing I saw on the news, you know anything about it?" The same energy she'd felt when organizing the futile search for Danny Truscott. But she was an outsider now, and she had crashed hard after the adrenaline high.

As she started to put her phone back in her bag, she saw the screen was crowded with alerts for texts that had arrived during the four hours she had been waiting or being questioned at Area South. Eight from Donna McLaren. Several from reporters. One that simply said "are you ok?"

"I'm ok" she texted back.

His emoji response came immediately, making her smile. She put her phone away hoping that brief exchange wouldn't get Dugan in trouble for fraternizing with the enemy. She

drove home, got out cheese and crackers and washed them down with half a bottle of cheap red wine. She set her glass in the sink and then fell into bed to sleep twelve hours straight.

In the morning she groggily went about making coffee, realizing as soon as it was filling the small flat with its tempting fragrance that she was out of milk. She went downstairs to get some from her absent-minded tenant, Adam. He might be too spacey to notice when melted snow was leaking through his ceiling, but being the single parent of an active three-year-old forced him to be organized enough to keep fresh milk in the fridge.

"Taking a trip?" she asked him, spotting an open suitcase in the middle of the living room. His young son was sitting in it, once-folded clothing strewn on the floor around him.

"We're leaving tonight. A friend of mine's getting married out in California. They're planning a . . . Daniel, what are you doing?" Daniel chuckled, unfazed. "Guess when he goes down for a nap I'll finish packing. I don't know what to do about Grommet, though."

Was that the name they'd given Daniel's goldfish? The little boy had been so excited when he'd shown her the fish in a plastic bag of water as they returned from the pet shop a few weeks ago. "Don't worry about it," she said. "I can feed him for you."

"That would be awesome. A woman I work with was going to take care of him, but turns out she has to go on a work trip."

“Just leave the food and instructions. I don’t mind stopping in once a day or whatever.”

“Great. But maybe you could take him to your place? We’ll be away for a whole week. He might get lonely.”

“Whatever. You mind if I . . .”

Adam’s attention was caught by something on one of his computer screens. “Dang it, that’s not supposed to happen.” He went over to tap at a keyboard.

“I’m taking some of your milk.” He didn’t even hear her. She went to the kitchen and was pouring milk into the mason jar she’d brought with her when a scrabbling sound made her freeze. She turned, scanning the room. Beady eyes peered at her from the top of the curtain rail over the sink, whiskers twitching. A naked pink tail curling down like an exposed earthworm. The rest of him brown and furry and fat.

“Adam?” she said, trying to stay calm. “We have a rat. A big one.” She couldn’t help shrieking when it shifted its weight and lost its balance. It scrabbled with its claws, swinging on the curtain before it fell, twisting, into the sink. A leap took it to the floor, making Anni trip over herself as she backed away fast. It scurried into the living room, where it squirmed its way into a pile of toys. She followed and snatched Daniel out of his suitcase.

“Adam?” she called out again. Dammit, she thought. How many were there? How much was an exterminator going to cost?

Daniel kicked and bounced in her arms as he pointed at the

pointy nose and glittering eyes peering at them from behind a stuffed toy. “Gommet!” he said happily.

She drank her coffee, half in a stupor, scrolling through the morning news on the laptop balanced on her knees, slowly overcoming the unpleasant feeling of early-morning grogginess spiked with a strong jolt of rat-fueled adrenaline. She should be happy to learn that there was only one rat in the house, and he was a pet, but picturing the brown furry beast scuttling along the baseboard made her shiver.

“They’re very intelligent animals,” Adam had tried to convince her. “Smart and affectionate.” It didn’t matter. Their naked tails gave her the creeps. Those little pink paws, like tiny grasping hands. The way they moved, rippling along the floor and shinnying up curtains. Ugh. She’d encountered too many rats in alleys and squats.

Adam had been disappointed when she told him a goldfish was one thing, she was not going to take care of a rat. She’d left him working his phone, trying to find a rat-sitter.

Pete Foster’s murder was at the top of the news, with film of reporters speaking from the scene, trying to look tragic, but mostly looking excited. A photo of the victim smiled out at the world he was all set to conquer as soon as he had his MBA in finance. Like most kids growing up on the North Shore he had a long pedigree of resume-ready accomplishments. There were quotes from fellow students and friends who were shocked and tearful. There was a boilerplate state-

ment from the police that suggested they had apprehended a suspect who they weren't ready to name just yet.

People on social media weren't as circumspect. Josh McLaren wasn't just named, his life was picked apart. People who remembered him from high school turned to Facebook to share anecdotes of his weird behavior, claiming they knew something like this would happen someday. Pete Foster's Twitter feed was full of grief and shock and messages of mourning and love for the dead man whose avatar was a beer stein and whose profile description was "entrepreneur, grad student at @chicagobooth. Connoisseur of craft beer, rugby and disruptive innovation."

Josh McLaren didn't have a Twitter or Facebook account. He had always been wary of social media and warned Anni how much personal information was being collected, how volumes of data could be processed at rates of speed unimaginable only a few years ago, how nameless information brokers were building intimate profiles of hundreds of millions of people. It had sounded like a symptom of his paranoia, but she was wary enough herself to use caution. She idly scrolled through the memorials on Pete Foster's Twitter account as she drank her coffee, realizing at one point that she was reading Foster's own Tweets. The last photo he had posted was a selfie, a bouquet of male faces, toasting themselves and their invincibility with raised beer bottles and goofy grins. Josh's neighbor Kyle was in the picture, the top of his head and one wide-open eye peering from the periphery, the rest of him obscured by the faces crowded around the man in the middle.

She scrolled back in time through Foster's feed. Comments aimed at friends. Jokes. Retweets of memes and microbrewery news, links to Silicon Valley news, salted with selfies and videos of himself and friends enjoying their lives. His account was a self-portrait of a handsome, cocky young man who assumed vast wealth was the object of the game, and investing in technology startups were how smart guys played it.

Kyle, she noticed, wasn't part of the Twitter stream except for that one photo. She remembered him telling her how Josh had introduced him to this crowd, people who he was tapping as investors in his startup. He'd offered to let her invest, too—as if she could afford it.

She vaguely remembered a program her downstairs tenant Adam had showed her to visualize Twitter connections. She found the link and plugged in Foster's feed. Circles and spokes bloomed on her screen, like a field of dandelions going to seed. The program identified his primary social connections and their relationships, a tight bundle of overlapping circles bristling with links to other circles. She wasn't sure what to make of the colorful graph, but noticed a familiar name, Devon Oachs. It took a moment to remember it was his residence where that happy group selfie had been taken shortly before one of them was murdered. Kyle's name was on the graph, too, but it was a dot far from the central cluster, his connections a small spikey appendage distant from the tightly integrated network around Pete Foster.

She searched for Devon Oachs' Twitter profile and found it was protected. He had accounts on all of the usual sites,

but they had their privacy settings locked down. The only social account belonging to him that wasn't private was on LinkedIn, and all it contained was a headshot of a young man in a suit who looked like a football player disguised as a stock broker, along with information about schools, jobs, and accomplishments found on a professional resume. A lawyer or parent had probably advised him to make his online life safe from prying eyes during the media storm. There was nothing suspicious about that. Even innocent posts could damage a person's reputation taken out of context, and reporters would be searching for anything about this case that could be turned into clickbait.

She checked Kyle's feed while she was at it. It seemed to be marketing for his startup mingled with the latest tech news. If he had posted anything last night—and chances are he would, good publicity for his business—he'd already deleted it.

She was filling her mug with the last of the coffee, trying to get fully charged, when her phone rang. She had to trace the tail of its power cord to find it hiding under the sheets in her unmade bed, but she got to it before it switched over to voice mail.

"Hey, sorry. Did I wake you up?" A man's voice.

"No. Just couldn't find my phone." The voice was familiar. Who was it?

"You still live near the park?" She heard Spanish in the background. The excited patter of a radio advertisement.

"Who is this?"

"Slovo. You wanted to know about Feliks Król."

“Right.” In spite of all that coffee, her gears were shifting too slowly this morning. “Um, yeah. Let me get a pen.”

“You still live near Humboldt Park? Give me the address. I can be there in a few.”

She pulled on some clothes, put on another pot of coffee, then tidied up before wandering to the front windows to watch for him. A neighbor was walking his dog. An elderly man shuffled up the sidewalk, a bag over his shoulder, leaning on a cane. A dark sedan backed into a parking space. Was that him? No, a woman got out and went around to the other side to get a child out of the backseat.

The old man paused in front of her house, one hand on the gatepost, as if he needed to catch his breath. The dog walker turned the corner. Anni looked up and down, wondering how long “a few” would really take when the old man took off his woolen cap and looked up, homing in on her window as if he knew exactly where she would be.

The memories flooded back. Area 4 headquarters, the sound of detectives catching up on paperwork, the smell of overcooked coffee. His cockeyed grin, that tripwire of a tem-

per. The rumors after the shooting that took Robin Freeling's life.

She went down the back stairs and through the gangway to let him through the gate, doing the math. How long had it been? Seven years? Eight? They must have been rough ones for him to have aged so much.

But that grin was familiar, and so was his curly hair, though it was trimmed short now, and the dirty blond was frosted with gray. "This your place?" he asked as she unlocked the gate.

"I live upstairs," she said. "Is that going to be . . ." She looked at his cane.

"No problem. What'd you do to your face?" He tapped his own cheekbone.

"Accidentally bumped it into a fist."

"Ouch." As he walked in front of her down the gangway, she noticed he had a slight limp, but it wasn't the pained shuffle of the man she had watched coming up the sidewalk. He even looked taller, now that he wasn't hunched over, the full six feet she remembered.

"Who lives down here?" he asked, tipping his chin at Adam's kitchen window as he started to climb the steps.

"I rent it to a guy with a kid and a rat named Grommet."

"A rat, huh?" As he made small talk he was scanning the area with the same habitual vigilance she was used to from cops. "They make good pets?"

"Personally? I don't think they're good for anything. I made coffee. Want some?"

"Do I ever." She pointed to the couch as she went to get mugs from the cupboard. He set his duffle on a chair, stuffed his cap into his coat pocket and hung it over the back of the chair, propped his cane against it, then sank into the couch, his legs stretched in front of him. His eyes looked sleepy, but they roamed the room, making a mental map, cataloging information.

"Milk? I make it strong."

He nodded. "Man, that smells good," he murmured, taking the cup, closing his eyes and breathing in the scent. "Bustelo?"

"Right. The corner store carries it. Still enough Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood."

He had a strange look on his face, puzzled, a little sad. "We used to drink this."

"They don't have it in Boston?"

"Not in my neighborhood." He drank deeply, then rested the mug in his lap, tilted his head back, and closed his eyes. "God, I'm tired."

"Long trip, huh? What brings you here?"

"You wanted to know about Feliks."

"I meant, to Chicago. You could have just called."

"I lost my phone."

"Yeah right."

"For real."

"Which is why you had to borrow some woman's phone the other day, right before things got a little chaotic at that store."

"You talked to Zoya? She's great. Like a hundred years old, but tough as nails."

"She says hello. Also, your Russian sucks, but I wasn't supposed to tell you that."

"Always ragging me about my accent. She was born in Petersburg. They're snobs."

She felt the sudden ping of a headache. "Look, can we stop messing around? What are you really doing here?"

He drank the rest of his coffee before he spoke. "It was time to move on. You caught me on the way out of town."

"And?"

He shrugged. She kept looking at him until he added, "I pissed some people off."

"How'd you do that?"

"Natural talent?" She frowned at him and waited. "What happened, okay, there's this lawyer. I did some interpreting for him. He has a lot of East European clients. Some of them are mixed up in criminal stuff. This one, he's kind of paranoid, and there was a misunderstanding. I thought I'd better get out of his way."

"He came after you in that store you were in when you called?"

"Some of his friends showed up. But I was leaving anyway."

"Your brother Steve will be happy to see you after all these years."

"You talked to him, too, huh?" His drowsy expression

didn't change, but his fingers tightened around his cup. He carefully set it on the floor, as if he was afraid he'd break it.

"Talked to your brother out in San Francisco, too. Talked to your ex." He closed his eyes and groaned. "I can't believe you never mentioned you were married."

"Not for long."

"Ten years."

"More like ten months. Not even. We were kids. We were stupid. Took a while for the divorce to come through, is all. Any of that coffee left?"

She took his mug and refilled it, sneaking another look at him. He had been fit and muscular. Now he just looked weathered, hardened, and the skin under his eyes was bruised with fatigue. She handed him the full mug, then put the skillet on the stove and pulled bacon and eggs out of the fridge.

"So, tell me about Feliks," she said as she laid strips of bacon in the pan. There was more to his leaving Boston than that bullshit story he'd fed her, but she could get it out of him later.

"He lived in a big old Victorian east of Ukie Village, this run-down boarding house that had an iron fence in front that looked like a row of spears, all sharp and pointy. Every morning he went to church and then he walked the alleys, rescuing things from the trash. That's where I first met him, in an alley a couple of blocks from where we lived."

"How old were you?"

"Four or five. It was like running into Santa Claus. He reached into this canvas bag he always had over his shoulder

and gave me a toy tractor. It had a little trailer thing you could hook on. If you dragged it through the dirt, it left marks, like you were plowing a field. Man, I loved that tractor. It was so small and perfect. I could put it in my pocket, but when I drove it around, I felt big.” He smiled to himself. “I didn’t have it for long. One of my brothers took it, but every time I saw Feliks, he had something in that bag for me. They said he was crazy, but I knew he wasn’t. He was always watching. Taking things in. He knew everything that was going on.”

“Like what?”

“Like who was getting evicted. Who was drinking too much and treating his family bad. Who was running short at the end of the month and didn’t have grocery money.”

“I heard from another one of the boarders that he liked kids a lot.”

“He loved kids. Adults, not so much. He was always trying to make . . . not sure what to call it. Like, a magic space in this shitty neighborhood where children couldn’t be hurt. Where they could be happy, like kids are supposed to be.”

“His art isn’t like that.”

“I wouldn’t know. Never knew he did any of that.”

She turned down the heat as the bacon started to sizzle and got her laptop. She brought up one of the notebooks she had saved and set the computer in his lap. “Take a look. There’s more in a file folder on the desktop.”

He browsed the notebook, then clicked on another one, as she fried potatoes and made an omelet. From time to time, she

glanced over at him, his face lit with the glow of the screen as he studied pages and clicked.

He set the computer aside when she brought plates to the table, but didn't say another word until they had finished eating. "Thanks. That was good." He wiped his plate with the last fragment of toast.

"You can see why people look at those drawings and think he was warped. Dangerous."

"They're looking at it wrong. I mean, I know it's weird stuff, but—it's like that tractor." He frowned, trying to work it out. "Just something you'd buy at the five and dime. But when I played with it . . ." He sighed with frustration. "It's hard to explain. He wasn't like other people. He saw the world from my angle, where that toy meant I could have my own little farm, all neat and tidy, though other people just saw a stupid kid messing around in a patch of dirt by the curb. He wasn't like the grownups who figured everything was fine if every Sunday you were in church and your clothes were ironed and your shoes were shined."

"But those notebooks. They always start with something real, something he read in the paper or heard on the radio, and he takes something awful and makes it worse."

"Not worse. Just filling in the blanks. The newspaper has the bare facts. He turns it into an adventure, a story where you know who the monsters are because they're big and have claws and flames coming out of their mouths. A made-up world where things make sense. Where God's paying attention."

"I don't know. They're so focused on pain and depravity."

He gave her a bleak smile. "He read the papers. He saw it when he was going down those alleys, poking through the trash. Running into kids who might have stories just as bad that nobody else knew about. Doesn't mean he liked it. Look, Feliks is the last person in the world who would harm Danny. He would have done whatever he could to save him if he was in trouble."

"By giving him toys he found in the trash?"

"Toys or food or just by paying attention to something nobody else noticed."

"You first met Król when you were around four years old. You kept up the acquaintance when you were adult. A cop in uniform, then plain clothes."

"Who told you this?" She hesitated. "C'mon, I'm just curious."

"One of the boarders."

"O'Hara?" She didn't nod, but he did, as if he'd read her mind. "I remember him. He was okay. Treated Feliks like a human being, anyway."

"In all that time, you never saw anything that would lead you to suspect that there was something off about the way Feliks interacted with kids?"

"No! Jesus. He never touched me, literally. No pats on the head, no hugs. I learned pretty quick that he didn't like being touched, either. Otherwise, I don't know. He had every opportunity to abuse kids. I would have done anything for him."

"When did you last see him?"

"I'm not sure. I was working weird hours. I wasn't good about stopping by."

"Did you talk to him after Danny disappeared?"

He thought about it. Shrugged. "I might have."

"After Sharla Peterson?"

"Whoa, wait. You're not trying to pin that on him?"

"No. We know who did that."

"I heard something. Didn't get any details." He frowned at his empty plate, straightened his fork.

"It turned out it was just a couple of drifters passing through town. One died, the other one confessed after he found religion in the joint. They were going to ask for a ransom, but got scared and . . . anyway. That was a big case for you. I thought you might remember if you saw him after that."

"I probably did. Mind if we sit somewhere else? This stupid hip of mine."

He limped back to the couch and shifted until he was comfortable. She took the other end, one leg folded under her, facing him.

"My grandmother lived a few blocks from his place," he said. "I used to swing by to see Feliks after visiting her. I don't think I saw him after she had her stroke. Shit. I should have been keeping an eye. He didn't have much money, just what he earned from cleaning a church. He didn't have many friends. He shouldn't have died alone."

"He didn't. There was a girl, well, a young woman. She got

him into the hospital when he got sick, then to some nursing home. He left all his stuff to her in his will. She and an art historian are the ones who found Danny's clothes."

"Huh. How'd you get involved?"

"I'm helping the art historian build up some background on Feliks. He's going write a book."

"About Feliks?" He laughed, confused. "This is so nuts."

"He's pretty excited about the art. And the publicity it's getting now that it's associated with a major crime, he's jazzed about that, too."

"You don't like this guy."

"He's a total jerk, but it gives me access to those notebooks and a chance to talk to the family again."

"And maybe find out what happened to Danny." She didn't respond. "Whatever it was, Feliks didn't harm him. I'm positive."

"How did those clothes get there, then?"

"I can think of a dozen ways. Someone fleeing the scene heard the description, so ditched the clothes on the way out of town, and Feliks picked them up, not knowing. Or someone living in the neighborhood took Danny and . . . whatever. Years later, the clothes got tossed and Feliks put them in that bag of his because that's what he did. You're working with the police on this?"

"I'm telling them what I find. Not sure it goes both ways."

"Never does. You tell them about me? That I knew Feliks?"

"Sure. They didn't seem that interested. At least they

weren't interested in helping me track you down. They could be looking for you for all I know."

He picked at the raveled edge of his sleeve, frowning. "Look, can you do me a favor?"

"Depends."

"When I left . . ." He didn't speak for a moment. "I didn't think . . ." He stopped and searched for words. "It's hard, coming home. When I left town, everything was so fucked up. I thought I'd put all that behind me. But it's coming back. Everything." He stared across the room for a moment, then shook his head slightly. "When I heard you say they were looking at Feliks for Danny Trustcott, I was about to hit the road anyway, and it seemed like I should come here, explain what he was really like. Make whoever's working it understand. It's all I was thinking about on the way. Explaining what he was like. How he looked out for me when nobody else gave a shit. But I didn't realize, I didn't expect . . . I can't talk to them. Not yet. Not until I get my head straight."

"But the cops who are investigating this—"

"I just need a day or two. Time to adjust. Thing is, when I left . . . You knew Robin Freeling."

"Your partner."

"My partner." His jaw tightened, and he swallowed hard. "Weirdest thing. I always worked alone until Robin. Coming into town, I kept thinking I was seeing her out of the corner of my eye. A reflection in a window, or somebody a block away who looked like her from the back, but then it wasn't. I don't remember much about that night when we were shot,

but it feels like it just happened. Like meeting Feliks that first time just happened. It's all . . ." He made a gesture with one hand, like turning a dial next to his temple. "All happening at once. I'm not ready to talk to anybody. The police. My family, Christ. Not yet." His words had a stuttering, crackling sound, like a radio slipping out of tune. "Once Steve finds out, he's going to want, he'll be all . . . He's a good guy, but I just can't face all that right now."

She remembered his brother's voice on the phone, talking about the violence in their house. "I don't have any reason to talk to your family," she said. "I only contacted them to see if they could put me in touch with you. The police, well, they'll probably want to talk to you, but they don't seem to be in any rush."

"Sorry. I know this sound pretty nuts. I just haven't slept in a while, and coming home, it's . . ." He couldn't finish the sentence. He just gave a tense embarrassed shrug.

When her phone vibrated in her pocket, it felt like a moment of reprieve, but she saw the number and her heart sank. "I'd better take this." He flicked a couple of fingers up to say sure, no problem, but kept his mouth tightly closed, two deep grooves around it.

She walked over to the front windows. "Hi, Donna."

"Why haven't you been answering your phone?" Her voice was hoarse, as if she'd been shouting for hours to get her attention.

"Sorry. I was really tired last night. I went to bed early and slept late."

"I've been leaving you messages. Do you realize what's going on? They say they're going to arrest Josh for stabbing that boy."

"It looks that way."

"Well, he didn't do it." She stated it as if was obvious.

"I spoke with the lead detective. I don't know him personally, but my sense is that he'll conduct a fair and thorough investigation."

"That man? He's already made up his mind. It's not right. You need to find out who did this. You need to do your job."

"I *did* my job." She stopped herself, took a deep breath. "I found Josh and I didn't let him get hurt. That's what I do. The police are the ones who investigate homicides, and I'm not going to get in their way."

"You still think they're always right, even after all those awful videos? The payouts? They're corrupt. They stick together, they cover things up. If they think they'll get away with this—oh, shut up, George! Stay out of this."

She turned to find Slovo watching her with a sympathetic grin. She rolled her eyes. A client. What can you do?

"Do you think this is easy for me?" Donna ranted on. "Do you think I'm not tired? I haven't slept a wink since that phone call of yours. If you won't do the work, I'll find someone who will."

"Donna, it's too soon to say what happened, but Josh hasn't been doing well lately. I'm sure he would never intentionally—"

"He did *not kill that boy*. I know my son. It's impossible. It has to be someone else."

"They have several witnesses."

"Those witnesses lied, then. They're covering something up. Listen, Pete Foster was no angel. He was a bully at school, always getting in trouble, serious trouble, but his parents bailed him out every time. I'm not a bit surprised that something like this would happen."

"He's the victim, here. Donna. His parents are suffering, too."

She heard a series of choked gasps, a thin wail. "I know, I know. I just . . . my boy. My Josh."

Anni closed her eyes, rubbed them. "Donna, you need to get some rest. We can talk about this later."

"But it wasn't him," she pleaded. "He didn't do it, he *couldn't*."

"He has a serious illness. He would never hurt someone when he's well, but when he's not, he gets confused and frightened. He may have felt threatened."

"Just because he has a mental illness doesn't mean he's dangerous. It could have been someone else, but they won't even check."

"They will. Believe me, they'll be very careful about how they handle this case."

"I don't understand why you're still so loyal to the police when we know they put innocent people on death row. Why do you trust them to get this one right?"

"Because you're rich," Anni blurted out. "Because you can

afford good lawyers. Because it's in the news and nobody is going to look at Josh and see a dangerous thug." She heard Donna whimper. "I'm sorry. That was unfair. It's just that I'm sure with all the media, they'll be extra cautious with this case."

"We may have advantages some people don't," Donna choked out. "But there's a lot of prejudice against the mentally ill, too."

"I don't think it's a factor here."

"Of course it is. It makes it so easy for them to blame Josh. I want an independent investigation. I want you to find out what really happened."

Anni gathered her wits and her patience so she could switch tactics, giving Donna what she needed instead of trying to reason with her. "Let's talk about it after you've had some rest, okay? You need to take care of yourself if you're going to be there for your son. Didn't you host a workshop about that once, self-care for caregivers? Right now you need to get some sleep. Then call me and we'll get together and figure something out, okay?" It took a few more minutes of soothing chit-chat before she could get Donna off the phone.

"Sorry about that," she said, turning. Slovo was sound asleep.

His head was tipped back, his legs sprawled, his mouth slack and half open. She cleared away the dishes as quietly as she could, but he didn't stir, even when a fork slipped off a plate and landed noisily in the sink. He looked awkward, his bad leg twisted, likely to wake up sore and stiff. She got a pillow and eased his head onto it, lifted his legs onto the couch, then took the duvet from her bed to spread over him.

She took her laptop to her desk and tried to figure out how to spend the day. She would have to stop by Area South and make a formal statement before long. She would probably have to make some gesture at talking to witnesses. Maybe when Donna wasn't in such a state she'd be able to accept that her disturbed son had finally committed the crime his voices accused him of whenever he was psychotic.

She fingered the tender spot under her left eye. It didn't look too bad, but it smarted when she touched it. Taking a breath, she picked up her phone and called Josh's neighbor.

He didn't answer, so she left a message, speaking in a low voice, though the man asleep on her couch didn't stir. "Hi, Kyle. This is Josh's friend, Anni. Could we talk sometime? His family is pretty freaked out about things and, um . . . well, just hoping we could touch base." She left her number and hung up.

She turned to the to-do list and decided to research the orphanage where Feliks Król had been sent, the one listed on his sad childhood report card.

Two hours later, she had a stiff back and a new appreciation for not having been institutionalized. As rough as life in foster homes had been, it wasn't as prison-like as Feliks Król's early childhood. She had gathered a handful of potential contacts from a hobby website that documented the history of the orphanage. Someone had even posted a copy of the same photo of solemn children posed on the orphanage's front steps that they'd found in the box with the picture of his mother. She made a list, then mapped out a route that would give her a chance to interview two of Król's fellow orphans on the way to the archives at Loyola University, where papers from the orphanage were kept.

She slipped her laptop into her bag, grabbed her keys, and wrote a note to Slovo before heading out. She wasn't sure it was wise to leave a man with so many unanswered questions alone in her flat, but she didn't have anything worth stealing and he looked likely to sleep for hours.

It was late when she returned. Adam was standing in front

of the house amid a clutter of bags and toddler supplies, keeping an anxious eye on Daniel, who was shrieking and running with his arms outstretched. "Airplane!" he shouted as he collided painfully into Anni's legs. Then he changed his mind and tried to climb them. She picked him up, her back protesting. "You guys need a ride to the airport?"

"I ordered an Uber with a child seat. I think this is it."

She helped the driver get all of the gear into the trunk as Adam muscled his son into the car seat and got him strapped in. "I keep thinking I forgot something." Adam patted his pockets worriedly.

"Phone? Charger? Wallet? Snacks for Daniel?"

"Oh, the keys. I almost forgot. Can you give these to Kostya?"

"To who?"

"Your friend," he clarified as she stared at him, puzzled. "He's going to take care of Grommet. Lucky, huh? I was getting desperate. He's going to house sit for us."

The cab pulled away and she climbed the stairs, seething with feelings she couldn't quite identify. The couch was empty, the duvet piled up in a heap. She heard the shower running. Slovo's coat was still draped over a kitchen chair. She went through its pockets, but found nothing beyond a crumpled fast-food wrapper, some loose change, and a pocket knife. She unzipped his duffel bag and rifled through it. Some T-shirts, a pair of jeans, underwear. A comb, a toothbrush, a bottle of Advil, nothing inside other than what was on the label. As the water shut off she tossed the pills back and zipped

up the duffel. Slovo stepped out of the bathroom, clinging to a small towel that barely made it around his waist. He had a wide welt of scarring that ran from the hip down to his knee, like a lightning strike that scored a tree trunk. "Oh, uh . . . hey, hope you, don't mind. You got an extra towel?"

She went to the basket of clean laundry near her bed and found a bath towel. He slung it over his shoulder, picked up his duffel, and limped back into the bathroom. His back was striped with shadows, she noticed, parallel lines of discolored skin. He whistled quietly in the bathroom, muffled behind the closed door. She'd seen scars like that before. While still in her probationary period, she arrested a man who believed in that biblical verse about spoiling children. He didn't spare the rod, or the fist, or the belt buckle. Her training officer explaining the strange marks on the child's back: that's from a radiator. The ones on his arms? Cigarettes. Like they were hieroglyphics she had to learn how to read.

A few minutes passed and Slovo was back, dressed, springy hair clinging damply to his forehead. "How's Adam doing?"

"He's on his way to the airport."

"Good deal. He was worried about missing his plane. Say, I noticed you had a couple of deodorants in there."

"Mi casa es su casa."

He didn't seem to register her sarcasm. "No, I didn't use it, just . . . look, I'm being a jerk, showing up like this. Is it going to bother your roomie?"

"My what?"

"Your boyfriend?" He pretended to nudge something out

of the corner of his eye, gaining time. "Just wondered if he might misread the situation."

"Like, he might see you making yourself at home and think that includes hitting on me whenever you feel like it, like old times?"

"Ouch."

"That is *not* going to happen."

"Man, I was such an immature asshole."

"No, you were a serial harasser. And an asshole."

He winced. "Fair enough. I don't do that anymore."

"Because you finally grew up? That's your excuse?"

"No, I . . . since I left here I met somebody." He rubbed his eye again, cleared his throat. "It didn't work out in the end, but I learned some things."

"How Oprah of you."

His mouth tightened. "Look, I don't know what I was trying to prove back then, but it was stupid, all right?"

"You made some kind of living arrangement with my tenant while I was out."

"He was freaking out. I never saw somebody so worried about a rat. Well, worried about a rat's welfare. Usually it's wondering how to get rid of the bastards. Did you know they're really smart? Adam said—"

"I own this building."

"Right. I would have checked, but you weren't here and his plane was leaving, so . . ."

"We need to get some things straight." She pointed at the couch.

He sat, clenching his hands between his knees like a boy called into the principal's office, but he wasn't clowning around now. He looked different. Not apprehensive or ashamed. Just tired.

"First, you need to tell me what went down in Boston."

He took a breath. Then he let it out and looked toward the door as if he'd rather be somewhere else.

"Don't fuck around. You tell me everything or I'm on the phone right now with the two detectives who are looking at your friend Król. They'll want to talk to you. They'll want to check in with Boston. And don't give me some sob story. I don't like being manipulated."

"Guess you have a right to ask."

"Damn straight."

"It's not anything bad. Well, it's bad, but it's not anything I did. Well . . ." He read her expression and changed course. "Okay, I'll explain. You know I was in Maine for a while? I busted my leg there, the one that was already messed up from the shooting. After that I wasn't good for much. I moved to a neighborhood in Boston where got to know this cop, a good guy. They have a sizable Russian community. Some are nice old ladies like Zoya, some aren't so nice. Anyway, my only job at the time was drinking and sleeping too much, so he got me hooked up with a defense lawyer who needed a translator. That guy hooked me up with some other folks and long story short, I ended up aware of a situation that got real messy because cops are involved."

"What kind of situation?"

“Trafficking. Women with E.U. passports, East Europeans, mostly, but also some kids from the boonies up north. I first learned about it from a friend from Maine who came down to claim a body, a runaway who tricked for a while before she OD’d. I realized it connected up with these Russians I’d met and I took it to my cop friend and he found out too late there was some police involvement and now it’s a total clusterfuck.”

“Which you decided to run away from, as you do.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, took a breath. “I left to slow things down. My friend is jammed up thanks to me, and in a week or he should have some information that will unjam him. But if they yank me in front of a judge too soon, the cops who are mixed up in all this will have the upper hand. I’m just delaying things for a few days.”

“Are you personally facing criminal charges?”

“What day is it?” Seeing her response, he quickly added “Maybe failure to appear. I was supposed to be in court this morning. Or yesterday? I’m losing track. Nothing else. Not even parking tickets, ‘cause I haven’t owned a car since I screwed up my leg. Believe me, if there was any way they could convict me of anything, they’d have thrown away the key long ago. This investigation has been in the works for more than two years.”

“How high up does it go?”

“A deputy superintendent. He’ll probably walk away without a scratch, maybe lose his pension but probably not. Below him, a captain and a whole strike force that’s in up to their

necks. They have the most to lose, and they do scary for a living. If things go right, in a week or so they'll be forced to turn in their badges, which is why right now they're losing their shit."

"What about the Russians?"

"They lost their shit a while ago."

"I mean, will they come after you?"

"Not likely. You know the really smart hackers from there? They guys who can turn an election or take out a power grid? These aren't those guys. They're just dumb thugs with police protection. I was more worried about the cops."

"Who know other cops. You sure coming here was a good idea?"

"Given what happened with Robin? Yeah, not my smartest move. Only this thing about Feliks came up. I didn't want him accused of anything he would never do, so I came to see if I could explain before I moved on. That was the plan, but then Adam said he needed a house sitter for a week and I was thinking okay, this could work. I could just lie low. With this Russian thing, always wondering when the next shoe would drop, having a few days somewhere safe, it was like a gift just fell in my lap. Too good to be true. I mean, you don't have much reason to trust me, and your boyfriend has even less."

"What do you know about a boyfriend?"

"Two toothbrushes and a brand of deodorant. That is all the Sherlock I got."

He'd had plenty of time to search her place, Anni thought. He could know a lot more than he let on. She remembered all

of the rumors that swirled around him when he ditched out on his dead partner. His own family had no clue what he was up to or where he'd been living for years.

Her danger signals should be ringing loudly but they weren't. She pictured him before, in the squad room, an outsider among the clannish band of brothers, but street smart, committed, working all hours and bringing in more convictions than any of them.

No. There was no way she could trust him, no matter how plausible he seemed.

"Sounds like you have more than one case going," he added. "Adam gave me a password for his computer. I could do some work for you, digging around online. Or just watch Netflix. He gave me that password, too. You might want to warn him not to talk to strangers. He's a little too trusting."

"Well, I'm not."

He nodded, looking resigned to what would come next. She still hadn't made up her mind.

"Is there someone who could vouch for you? That cop friend of yours in Boston?"

"He's already in enough trouble, and he's being watched." He chewed a thumbnail, thinking. "There's this immigration lawyer who knows the situation because of clients. You can look her up, she's legit. Only it would be better if she didn't know where I am, being an officer of the court and all."

"What's her name?"

"Anita Brockhurst. She has her own practice, teaches part time at BU Law."

Anni got her laptop, did a quick search and scanned pages, glancing at Slovo as she learned what she could. Brockhurst apparently was used to handling sensitive information online, with instructions on her site about how to contact her using end-to-end encrypted messaging. Anni could cross-check her credibility. No doubt the civil rights lawyers she worked with could get some inside dope. On the other hand, he had gotten in a mess in Boston and ran away from it, just like when he'd left the CPD. She knew enough of his past to distrust him, or at least have doubts.

He nodded as if she'd spoken aloud. "Never mind. This won't work. It's too risky. Your boyfriend or whatever, he's going to notice."

"He's away this week. For work."

"Cool, but you're not comfortable with this. Don't worry about it. I'll go. Only think about what I said. Feliks didn't hurt Danny. Somebody else is responsible. You need to find out who."

"No, I don't. My only job is gathering background on Król."

"Well, keep an open mind, anyway. I know it would feel good to close that case, but—"

"Didn't I just say? It's *not my case*." Maybe she was just tired after dealing with Josh and spending a day running around town chasing slim leads on a man who drew disturbing pictures worth an obscene amount of money. Maybe it was the weirdness of having a man she had worked with at Area 4 Headquarters sitting on her couch, or the aftershock of seeing

that shirt, those sandals that had been part of a description she put out ten years ago as she set up operations on a hot day in Grant Park. It was her case, past tense, and it was still part of her, a nagging itch she couldn't reach.

If Slovo was willing to go through those creepy notebooks she wouldn't have to, she thought. He might pick up on things she would miss. He knew Król personally. He might have even worked on some of the crimes that inspired the crazy old man to imagine those scenes of cruelty.

She was an idiot, she thought, if she didn't kick him out immediately.

"Course, somebody's going to have to feed that rat," he added, starting to rise from the couch.

She waved him back and said she would check out what that lawyer had to say before she made a decision. But she knew he could tell, with that goofball grin of his, that it was settled.

God, he was annoying.

Following instructions on the lawyer's site, Anni installed the Signal app and set it to erase messages automatically, then composed a cautious message to Anita Brockhurst. A response pinged back immediately.

Brockhurst made it clear in her first message that she didn't want to know where Slovo was, but she could confirm he was handling a difficult situation using his best judgment. He had not broken any laws that she was aware of, but it was possible he could be taken into custody if he was careless.

- > Could I be charged with harboring? Anni thumbed.
- > They could try, but it wouldn't hold up. He's not a fugitive. If his status changes, I'll notify you.
- > He bailed on a court appearance.
- > We worked it out. Postponed. No bench warrant, no charges for failing to appear.
- > But he's in trouble? Are there three-letter agencies involved?

Three dots showed a response was coming, but it took a while.

> It's a complicated situation. He knows the risks.

> What about me?

> Legally you should be fine, but it's my duty to inform you that he's kind of an asshole. Don't take any shit from him. And don't ask him what's going on. Safer for you. If things go sideways, don't talk to the police. Call me immediately and we'll handle it pro bono. You should be okay.

It didn't reassure Anni, being told twice.

> How likely is it to go sideways?

> Depends on various factors, including him keeping out of sight for the next 3-4 days.

> After that?

Those three dots again.

> Unclear at this point.

After she watched the texts vanish one by one, she turned to Slovo. "I've been instructed by your lawyer to not take any shit from you."

"She's a good attorney. I would take her advice."

"Did Adam say when he was coming back?"

"Sunday."

"She wants you to stay out of sight for a few days. When it's good and dark, you're going to go downstairs, take care of the damned rat, and hole up. Keep the blinds drawn. Don't answer the door. Don't answer the phone."

"He doesn't have a landline. I'm phoneless."

"Good. Keep the noise down and the lights off. The neigh-

bors might have seen you, but I'll put the word out that Adam's away this week and nobody's home but me. You need anything . . ."

"I'll be fine."

"I'll stop by sometime tomorrow with some food. Otherwise, it'll be solitary confinement. Do you think you can do this?"

"You kidding? I have two years' worth of sleep to catch up on. Besides, could be good practice for what comes next. Solitary. That's a joke."

She decided to ignore that. "I may want to pick your brain about Król."

"Sure. I'd like to help. If you copy those files, I can take a look. I might pick up on something."

"Maybe."

"And I can maybe dig up some background. Nothing better to do."

"You're supposed to be lying low."

"Don't worry, I've learned how to avoid leaving a digital trace. Had to have a crash course, the stuff I've been doing lately."

"Tell me about it. Took me forever to track you down." She made a sudden decision. "Okay, I'll copy some files. They're huge, it'll take a while. Let's have something to eat."

She dug through her desk drawer to find her biggest USB drive, wiped out the files on it, and started to copy the first collection of notebooks that had been scanned. Dinner was a

process of cleaning out her refrigerator to microwave a motley selection of leftovers and make a salad of anything that wasn't too wilted. As they ate, he asked what she had learned about Król. She told him what she knew so far, including the scraps she'd picked up from the two elderly men she'd talked to that afternoon.

One didn't remember him from the orphanage, didn't like thinking about that place, and wanted to get back to his TV show where some right-wing blowhards were ranting at high volume. The other was more forthcoming, showed her a scrapbook with some photos. He remembered Feliks as quiet, dreamy, always off in his own world. The bigger boys were mean to him, and sneaky enough about it that it was always Feliks who got in trouble. Couldn't blame him if he lost his temper from time to time.

"Huh. Somehow I can't image Feliks losing his temper." Slovo said. "Stuff seemed to roll right off his back. Reminded me of these saints, guys who went into the desert and lived alone for decades. A hermit living in the middle of the city."

"You must have gone to Catholic school."

"Occasionally, when I wasn't busy being a truant. You too?"

"Depended on the foster home we were in," Anni said, thinking about the times her brother was bullied at school. He mostly curled up and rocked as they piled on. She was the one who got in trouble for losing her temper.

"So this guy I talked to, he said things changed in the nineteen fifties," she went on. "Some of the boys were sent to

live with relatives or even a parent. I figured orphans were, you know, orphans, but apparently these places used to take in kids whose parents were too poor to take care of them. When they switched to a foster system, doctors came to run tests on the kids. They decided some of the other boys were too anti-social and disturbed to leave the orphanage. Basically, the ones who the doctors labeled deficient, they stayed behind."

"A mental asylum for kids, huh?"

"That's what it sounds like. He thinks Feliks was one of the ones who got left behind, but he wasn't sure. Loyola has some records from the orphanage in their archives. I'm going to have to go back there to do more digging. I barely got started yesterday. There are boxes and boxes of stuff."

"What other leads do you have?"

"Not much. Feliks had a brochure from a memorial service at Elgin State Hospital's chapel."

"You have this brochure?"

"I took some photos." She flicked through her photo album, then remembered she'd used Linnea's phone, sent as a text. "Here you go. The first one, that's Felik's mother." He took the phone and studied it. "She wasn't married. People gave them a hard time."

He scrolled. "A report card. Looks like mine. Unsatisfactory across the board."

"Keep going."

He flicked the screen. "Laurence Abbott, *requiescat in pace*, 1961. Wonder who he was?"

“Someone important enough that Feliks kept the pamphlet. I mean, his room was stuffed with paper, but these were the only things I saw that seemed obviously personal, saved in a little box. Made me wonder if Feliks was committed to the mental hospital for a while, but the records are closed unless you’re a relative and can get a court order. I still haven’t visited the nursing home where he died, but they probably have restrictions on patient information, too, so I’ll have to be creative.”

“You can probably expense that creativity. Put it down under ‘hospitality.’”

She laughed. “The place is run by nuns, I’m not sure bribery will work. Hey, remember what a pain it was to deal with C.I.s? All the paperwork, even if you weren’t asking for money to pay them?”

“Fuck that. I had plenty of C.I.s and I never bothered.”

“I don’t know how you got away with it.”

“Cops get away with shit all the time. Your problem was you followed the rules. That’s how you get in real trouble.”

“No kidding. You know what happened to me, right? I told the truth when I was under oath. You don’t do that when the defendant is a cop. So they made my life hell and I quit.”

“Christ. At least now you have less paperwork and no brass breathing down your neck.”

“Less money, too. But the truth is, I would never have lasted anyway. I never belonged, not really.” She thought about Dugan, how he seemed to effortlessly fit in and yet kept his moral compass. How did he do it?

“What’s going on with your other cases?” She gave him a quick rundown of Pete Foster’s murder. “You think your guy did it?”

“Probably. He was in pretty bad shape. Though . . .” He raised his eyebrows, inviting more. She wasn’t sure what it was that was niggling her. “I don’t know. It doesn’t feel right. Josh’s mother was babbling about how mean the dead guy was when he was a kid, that he got in trouble a lot, but it was probably just talk. She was upset, grasping at straws.”

“They knew each other at school?”

“Josh said he didn’t have any friends in high school. He was a good student, but he had trouble getting along socially.”

“Especially if he was a good student. Way to make yourself unpopular. How’d he end up at this guy’s party?”

“Good question. Maybe he followed his neighbor Kyle over? It was Josh who introduced Kyle to these guys he went to school with up on the North Shore. That crowd has money, lots of it, and Kyle’s looking for investors, trying to get some tech business off the ground.”

But the timing was wrong, Anni realized. The party would have started before midnight, surely. Given the paranoid state Josh was in, if he went with Kyle, things would have come to a head long before the stabbing happened. When was that Twitter photo taken? She reached for her phone, started to search.

“Might be worth following up on that. The money,” Slovo was saying.

“You said that with Danny.”

"I did?"

"Follow the money. Brian Truscott's business records looked suspicious, but it didn't pan out."

"What are you looking for?"

"Sorry, this is just . . . the victim posted a selfie at the party. Here it is. No time stamp, just the date. But if it's accurate, the party started hours before he got stabbed." She showed it to him. "The one in the middle, holding the phone, that's the dead guy. Kyle's at the back."

"I assume this was before what's-his-name showed up. Josh?"

"Must have been. The police will be able to put the timeline together. When Josh goes off the deep end, the neighbors know about it, and pretty soon reporters do, too."

"Just like Danny's case. You have a talent for picking the hot ones."

"I wouldn't call it talent."

"Did following the money help with Danny?"

"Not really. I mean, the dad seemed like kind of a crook, but nothing out of the ordinary for Chicago. He still pals around with politicians, working real estate deals. Apparently he's told the cops he's going to increase the reward to half a million, which . . ." Her voice trailed away. She realized Slovo was watching her, waiting for her to finish her thought. "Joyce said they didn't have that kind of money. Half a million is a lot, but he does multi-million dollar deals all the time. Makes me wonder if they're having financial problems—not that it matters, now, I suppose, but for a while ten years ago

I had convinced myself that this was all tied into his business dealings. Had me pretty excited for a few hours before it got shot down. Did you get enough to eat?”

“I’m good, thanks.” He yawned, shifted in his seat, and winced. She realized it was coming up on midnight.

“Let me see if those files have finished copying.”

She ejected the USB drive and handed it to him. He pocketed it and picked up his duffel, coat, and cane. She went first, checking the houses across the alley, looking up and down the block for headlights heading for a garage or people on the move. A shadow moving across her brick patio stilled, then slipped into the bushes. Just the cat.

She beckoned and Slovo went silently down the stairs, fitted the key into the lock and vanished inside. No lights went on. He would be moving stealthily through the apartment, closing the blinds, battening the hatches. Doing a disappearing act.

Anni went back into her flat and cleared the table, humming to herself, making mental lists for the next day. As she finished washing the dishes, she realized how good it had felt to talk shop.

Donna McLaren woke her up with call at seven a.m. sharp. “What progress have you made?”

“Progress?” Anni rubbed her eyes.

“What have you done so far?”

“Donna, have you been able to get any rest?”

“It’s a simple question. What are your plans?”

"Hang on." Anni unwrapped herself from the bedclothes and set the phone down as she filled the kettle. She scooped coffee into the pot and then picked the phone up again. "I haven't made plans. Josh is in the hospital, where he'll be safe."

"Safe!"

"He's getting treatment. Which is where my job ends."

"Don't be silly. We pay you to deal with problems when he's having an episode—"

"I did that."

"—and this time he got into trouble on your watch, and you need to fix it. Something happened at that party, and he got blamed for it. Why was he even there?"

"I'm not sure. I know his neighbor was planning to go."

"That boy across the hall? The dentist's son? That's strange. How did he get invited?"

"He's taking classes at the business school. He probably knows the guy who hosted the party from school." Actually, Josh had introduced them, but it didn't seem a good idea to tell Donna about it. It would just become grist for a conspiracy theory.

"Devon Oachs." Donna spat it out. "He was one of the gang that made Josh's life so difficult in high school. They would never have gotten into the university if they weren't legacies, they didn't have the grades. They were too busy being juvenile delinquents. You need to talk to these boys, find out what really happened."

"I'll check with Kyle again," Anni said, hoping to placate

her. "I also have to talk to the police, sign a formal statement. I'll see if I can find anything out." Fat chance, Anni thought to herself.

"You won't learn a thing from them. They act so nice, so sympathetic, but if you ask a question? Forget it, they clam right up."

"That's the way investigations go. Sounds as if you've been interviewed yourself."

"Barely. Our lawyer keeps cutting me off. I swear, he's siding with the police. He keeps talking about an insanity defense instead of getting to the bottom of—Just a minute." Anni heard a muffled conversation, Donna's voice rising in anger. Then she was back, her voice icy and imperious. "Talk to that boy, the dentist's son. See if you can find out what really happened. Do whatever it is you used to do when you investigated murders. You'll be paid. It's *my own money*." Those last words were loud, furious. Meant for someone else.

"Donna . . ."

"Just do it," she hissed. "I expect a report by end of business," she added, more calmly, but Anni heard her draw a breath and give a hiccupping sob before the line went dead.

The kettle whistled. Anni groggily went about making a pot of coffee.

A little past noon, Anni made a show of climbing the front porch and picking up the mail and taking it into Josh's flat, like a good landlord. "Slovo?" She said into the shadowy dark. "It's just me." She set the mail and a sack of food down on the coffee table in front of Adam's oversized leather couch.

"Something smells good," he said, materializing from the bedroom.

"I was way up on the North Side, going through the orphanage's archives. Stopped by one of those Indian restaurants up on Devon." She unpacked the tinfoil pans of aloo gobi, dahl, lamb vindaloo, and garlic naan. "Got a little carried away. You sleep okay?"

"Got a few hours in. Stayed up late, reading through those notebooks Can you get me more of them?"

"Sure. You see anything interesting?"

"It's all interesting. Strange, though, realizing this guy I thought I knew had invented an entire world of his own. A

place that must have felt like home to him, as much time as he spent in it. Like, he developed his own mythology, part Catholicism, part comic books and fairy tales. These angels pop up, over and over, and dragons. Lots of dragons. Some of them are big and scary and work for the enemy, some are small and kind of cute and are on the side of the children. All different children, but in a way it's chapters of a single story. Same struggle between good and evil, over and over. Good doesn't come off so well most of the time."

She got plates from the kitchen. He pulled up a chair and settled in, stretching out his bad leg. There was just enough sunlight slanting through the blinds to see what they were dishing up. "Some of the setting seems based on that orphanage of his," he went on after sampling a bite. "Like, his life is mixed into these kids' stories. And there's a building that looks like photos of Elgin State Hospital, though it's a dungeon in the stories. All that plus elements of real crimes. One of those notebooks was about a case I worked. I must have talked to Feliks about it, because there's stuff in his version that wasn't public."

"You talked to him about your cases?"

"Sometimes, especially if I'd had a few drinks. Not like he was going to spill it to reporters or anything." He reached for a piece of naan. "I didn't have anyone else to talk to. Not until Robin, anyway."

"So that story based on your case, was it true to life? I mean, did he write it like it happened?"

"God only knows what really happened to that child. We

made an arrest, but none of it made any sense. Feliks filled in the blanks with more than we could ever find out. There weren't ever any angels around that I could see."

"I wonder if Król made one of his stories about Danny."

"It was in the news, enough, he must have read about it."

"We talked to him. Not me, one of the uniforms doing the canvass. Didn't get anything out of him. Didn't even spell his name right. But wouldn't that be all the more reason to write a story about Danny? It was probably the only case he was personally asked about. Maybe we'll find out in a few years, when Sidlo finally gets around to inventorying that part of the precious treasure box of wondrous artwork."

"Oh, hey. I found these." He unfolded the other piece of paper he'd pulled from his pocket and handed it to her. A list of names and phone numbers.

She peered at it. "Who's Sheila . . . Johnson?" His handwriting was terrible, a childish jumble of letters bumping into each other.

"Sheila Abbot Johnson. Daughter of the man on that funeral service brochure Feliks kept. Don't know if she'll know anything, but worth a try. The next five on the list are people who worked at the hospital when that funeral service was held. Probably a bust. They had a lot of patients out there. Even if Feliks was one of them, I doubt they'd remember. That last name, though, he's been retired for years but he was a psychiatrist there for decades, starting in 1960. He might be reading the news and wondering whether that quiet

oddball was actually a violent pedophile. Assuming Feliks was committed, which we don't actually know."

"You've been busy."

"You would have found this stuff if you weren't tied up with your other case. Also, what you said, Danny's family maybe being in financial trouble? I think it's more than that. There are rumors flying that Truscott's real estate empire is on the rocks. Hints he's in legal trouble over bribes to officials, something bigger than the usual palm-greasing. May be some money laundering involved."

"Where'd you get all this?"

"The internet is an amazing invention. Stand on a corner and you can overhear all kinds of conversations. You find anything in those archives?"

"Not really." Just the weird feeling of drifting back in time, wandering ghostlike through a thicket of numbers and budgets and annual reports that described the wholesome hygiene lessons and spiritual guidance provided to the boys, with a list of the names of orphans, with an appendix for the ones who'd died that year. Age seven, age nine. As she read those records and sorted through photos she kept thinking about Król's images of children in trouble, children fleeing, children being hurt. "Just a few dates." She pulled a notepad out of her bag and thumbed through it. "DOB. Year he entered the orphanage, year he left. Those were the only mentions I could find, but it's more than I had." She picked up the scrap of paper with contacts Slovo had found for her. "This might help."

"Let me know what you find out."

She gathered up her things. "Keep the leftovers. I have to go to Area South to sign a statement about my client."

"Area South?"

"The city decided to save money by consolidating the detective divisions. There are only three now, North, Central, and South, and none of them are where the homicides are."

"That's crazy."

"It's a disaster. The clear rate's in the toilet." She caught herself about to quote Dugan on it. Slovo didn't need to know the owner of the extra toothbrush in her bathroom was a cop. Which made those questions tickle the back of her neck again: Why was she trusting this guy? He was on the run, and not for the first time. Was what he told her the whole story?

She pushed it aside and grabbed a piece of naan to eat in the car. "I'll bring you more of those scanned notebooks tomorrow."

Nearly three hours had passed before she was finished at Area South, most of it waiting, keeping her eyes on her phone to avoid the sidelong glances and murmured comments of officers milling through the place. She could be imagining it. There were a thousands of officers in the CPD, and only a few of them had ever worked with her. They could be complaining about the place they ate lunch or some new directive that was screwing up their work, but as every

minute of those three hours ticked by she felt as if she was in hostile territory. She had been part of this, once. She had missed it. Now she was just relieved to escape to her car.

She drove to Josh's apartment building and called Kyle. No answer. She probed her memory for that night in March when Josh had woken the neighbors as she studied the list of names beside the entrance. Which ones had been most receptive to her questions? She tried the apartment below Josh's where a sociology grad student had tried to be helpful. Nobody home. She tried two more doorbells before she reached a woman who lived on the top floor, a visiting professor at the divinity school. She offered Anni a cup of tea, but didn't know anything. She had been away at a conference and was shocked to find a troubled neighbor had been arrested for murdering a student. This city.

Anni knocked on more doors, without any luck, writing notes on the back of her cards and slipping them under the door, until she reached Josh's landing. The apartment still had a police seal on the door. Across the hall she heard music coming from Kyle's apartment. She knocked, but no one answered. She turned to head down the stairs when she heard a crashing sound, like a bin full of beer cans falling over. "Kyle?" she called out. "It's Anni, Josh's friend." She listened, but heard nothing other than the music. Maybe he had a cat, and it was making a mess in his absence. She wrote a note on the back of a card and slid it under his door before going down the stairs to try a few more doors.

It was when she was talking to a man in the apartment

directly below Kyle's that she heard the floor creaking overhead from footsteps. "It's an old building," he said, noticing her looking at the ceiling. "You hear everything, including that head case when he's ranting and raving. I missed the latest drama, but I don't know why he wasn't evicted the first time there was an incident. I mean, what if he attacked one of us?"

"Did you happen to hear Josh go out late Saturday or early Sunday morning?"

"I must have slept through it. Do you know when the police will finish with that apartment? I got a friend looking for a place."

She went back upstairs. "Kyle? I know you're in in there. Can we talk?" She waited and knocked again. "Kyle? I need to talk to you, and I'm not going anywhere."

It took two more minutes of knocking before the door opened a crack, on a chain. "I can't talk. I'm sick."

"What is it, the flu?"

He looked pale and shaky. "I don't know. I feel awful, I need to go back to bed."

"Can I come in for just a minute?"

"No, really. I can't deal with this right now."

"I just need to know one thing: how did Josh know about the party?"

He blinked at her for a long moment. "I don't know. He just showed up."

"Like, right before it happened? Or did he get there earlier?"

He stared at her. “He came late,” he finally said.

“So, he got there around three am, is that right?” He didn’t respond. “I’m just trying to figure out how he even knew about it.”

He closed his eyes and licked his lips, looking queasy. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“When Josh came to the house—” she started to ask, but he closed the door before she could finish the question. She heard the bolt turn.

What the hell? She thought to herself. He had been outgoing and eager to talk in the past. Though witnessing a murder could change a person. He must still be processing it.

Or maybe he was just upset that his chance to raise startup funding had gone so badly awry, she thought as she started her car. That selfie on the dead man’s Twitter feed showed him anxiously trying to break into an inner circle, an outsider looking to be one of the guys.

She looked for the contact information he’d sent to her when she first met him, clicked on the web link for his business. The site looked slick and professional, like a million others. She scrolled down to a “who we are” section. Four perky young faces and titles, including the company’s marketing manager. Anni did a quick search and found the woman was a senior majoring in Communication Studies at Northwestern whose passions were visual culture and her two cats, Bella and Twerp, who had an entire Instagram account of their own.

She tapped in the phone number, composing a voicemail

in her head, but was startled to get a real voice, so cheerful it sounded almost manic. “Hi, this is Laurel.”

“Hello. Could I ask a few questions about your company? I was just talking to Kyle . . . Peterson.” She had to quickly scroll back to confirm his last name.

“Really? I’ve been texting him like crazy, but he’s not responding.”

“I think I got him out of bed. He looked a little shaky.”

“How do you know Kyle?”

“Fiend of a friend. He told me about your startup, said would be a solid investment if I was looking for an opportunity.”

“Totally! We’re still in development, but our beta testers have been super excited. And we’re getting traction with investors. Are you interested in using MiMi as a business application?”

“Well, I own a business, but—”

“That’s awesome! I can set you up with a free account so you can see it in action. There are features we haven’t launched yet, but the integrated impact dashboard is fully functional and it’s fabulous. And the cool thing is, we just got some serious VC to take it to the next level.” She giggled, excitement leaking out of her like steam under pressure.

“VC?”

“Venture capital. We just got a major infusion of funding. That’s why I’m trying to reach Kyle. I’m working on our press release. It’s so exciting. We’ll be able to pay our programmers to build out our functionality.”

“Cool. I’d love to talk to you about this in person. What’s the address?”

“Address?”

“Of your business. You’re in Chicago, right?”

She laughed again in a way that seemed somehow condescending. “Who needs to rent office space these days? We’re a cross-functional team of collaborators using the internet itself as our workspace. But we can totally meet if—”

“That’s okay. This press release you’re writing, will it include who this new investor is?”

“Do you think I shouldn’t? I mean, I was going to, but . . . I’m kind of new at this.”

“I don’t see why not. I mean, it’s impressive, it could give people like me more confidence about investing.”

“Then I will. ‘DBT Ventures is pleased to partner with . . .’ Or should I do it the other way around, ‘MiMi is excited to partner with DBT—’”

“DBT?”

“Devonshire Bradford Tech Ventures LLC. I literally just got the call an hour ago. Well, two hours ago, I guess. Time flies when you’re trying to get a press release put together! Kyle has been working so hard to land us some capital, I really wanted to share the news with him, but . . . well, I don’t know if you know this: he lives on the South Side and witnessed a violent crime over the weekend. It really shook him up. When I talked to him yesterday he didn’t sound good. Not himself at all.”

“That’s what I thought. He’s usually so outgoing.”

“Totally. He was really stressed yesterday. Practically hung up on me, and now he’s not answering my texts. I thought this news might cheer him up. Are you going to see him again? We’ve all been talking to potential funders, but he deserves the credit for landing this one. The guy said so, specifically. He wanted me to let Kyle know it was his work that closed the deal.”

“What guy was that?”

“The DBT guy.” There was an implied “duh” in her voice.

“I mean, you’ll need to put his name in your press release, won’t you?”

“I suppose? Sure. I wrote it down . . . Matthew Bradford. He’s, like, the president or something? CEO? I’ll put in a quote from him about how much he believes in the company. He said something like that, anyway. Honestly, I was so excited I forgot to take notes.”

“Can you send me the press release when it’s done? I know some reporters I could forward it to.”

“That would be awesome!”

Anni gave her the email address, hung up, and went to the Illinois Secretary of State’s website to look up Devonshire Bradford Tech. Within seconds she had a list of its key personnel. “Okay, that’s weird,” she said out loud. There were five names and addresses. One of them was Devon Oachs, and his address was the house where Pete Foster had been stabbed to death.

“So, what? A payoff? Is that what you’re thinking?”

“But that would be crazy, wouldn’t it? I mean, the timing is weird but . . . would someone actually do that? It looks so fishy.”

“Desperate people do things that look fishy.” Slovo picked up a slice of the pizza she’d brought and took a big bite. He broke off a piece of crust and gave it to the rat sitting on his shoulder. “Let’s think about this. The murder happened on Saturday.”

“Early Sunday morning, actually.” Anni watched the pet rat grasp the crust with its little pink paws and make short work of it. Ugh.

“At the house of a guy who Kyle has been hitting up for funding. And by Tuesday afternoon he’s writing a check for . . .”

“Fifty thousand. That’s the first tranche, according to the

press release. The total investment is going to be two hundred K. What's a tranche, anyway?"

"Beats me." Slovo scrutinized the pizza slice, made a face, picked something off it and offered it to the rat. "Want this, little guy?" The rat sniffed, then started exploring his collar for crumbs. "Look, even rats won't eat it. Who puts salted fish bones on pizza, anyway?" He dropped it on the pizza box and wiped his fingers on his shirt.

"I like anchovies."

"We have more discerning tastes." He broke off another piece of crust for the rat while Anni picked the offending anchovies off his half and put them on hers. "I called Kyle again, but he won't pick up."

"What are you thinking?"

"I don't know. There's nothing to go on. None of the people who were at that party will talk to me. Believe me, I tried. Tracked them down based on the selfie the victim posted to Twitter before he got gutted. Lot of good it does me. They aren't talking." I should check in with Az Abkerian, she thought to herself. He was good at getting people to open up, and he had contacted her about the story. Let him do the legwork.

"What's the scenario?"

"The classic. They were drinking, they got into an argument. A weapon was handy. How a lot of homicides happen."

"And then a guy comes along just in time, saying crazy

stuff, and they figure they have an easy way out? Kind of convenient, huh?"

"Right. It's way too big a coincidence."

"Unless Kyle called and invited him over. Any chance of that?"

"Huh. If Josh's parents pay his phone bill, their telecom might let them look at his phone records online." She moaned. "God, I'll have to talk to Donna."

"Go on. Get it over with."

"What, now?"

"Now. Otherwise you'll have it hanging over you."

She sighed and pulled out her phone. Yes, Donna told her, Josh was on their family plan. Donna had no idea how to access the records online but she would talk to the company and find out.

"Okay, that wasn't too painful," Anni said after ending the conversation in record time. "She said she'd get on it and get back to me. Hope I didn't get her hopes up. This is a long shot."

"Trust your instincts," Slovo said. "Did you have a chance to check out those contacts I gave you?"

It took her a moment to switch gears. "Oh, the Elgin State Hospital ones? Yeah. Feliks was committed there when he turned sixteen. That retired doctor is pretty sharp for his age. He beat around the bush for a while on confidentiality, but he was curious and somehow became convinced I was acting on behalf of his heirs, so it was okay. I don't think it's supposed to work that way. Anyhow, he remembered Feliks, as one of

his first patients. He had been diagnosed as mentally deficient, but the guy said that was probably wrong in hindsight. These days he would probably get an autism diagnosis.”

“Didn’t you have . . . I may be remembering this wrong. A family member with autism?”

“My brother. Right. I’ve been wondering if Feliks was on the spectrum. Mostly nonverbal, like my brother. Obsessive. Big on routines, rituals. At first, I didn’t want to think he was anything like my brother. Those pictures he drew seemed so . . . disturbed. So crazy. My brother’s not crazy.”

“Neither was Feliks.”

“So, apparently he tried to run away from the hospital several times. Managed to escape sometime in the early sixties. Kind of amazing when you think about it. Somehow he made his way back to Chicago, back to the neighborhood where he’d lived with his mother when he was small.”

“See? Not crazy.” Slovo picked up the rodent and a half-eaten slice of pizza, limped over to put them both into a wire cage. “What are you up to this afternoon?”

“I want to talk to Danny’s sister.” *I only let go for a minute. It’s not my fault.* She could hear the little girl’s voice, defiant and anxious. “Oh, here are some more of those notebooks.” She passed over a USB drive. “That ought to keep you busy and off the streets.”

“Why do you want to talk to Cassie?” Joyce asked when Anni called her.

“I know she was really young when Danny disappeared,

but maybe she remembers something she didn't tell us back then." Joyce didn't say anything. "I'm just trying to fill in the blanks."

"I don't know. It was so traumatic for her."

"I'm sure it was."

"Being a middle child isn't easy under the best of circumstances, but having an older brother with a disability meant she didn't get enough attention. And then, Danny. Being the last one to see him. She wouldn't like me telling you this, but she attempted suicide a couple of years ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"The guilt. After the hospital and a few months of therapy, she dropped out of school and moved into the city. She's estranged from us, now. Angry with her father over . . . well, a lot of things. Angry at me, too, for not making things better. Angry at the world." She laughed, bleakly. "She came into the world that way. Oh, she had such a loud cry. Nothing would comfort her. I'd walk the hall with her for hours trying . . . well, anyway, it's never been easy for her, especially after we lost Danny. She'd been doing so much better, lately, getting training as a tattoo artist, working as a seamstress. She even designs costumes for productions at Moonbeam."

"The theatre?"

"They're putting on a Camus play next month. I was hoping to get to it, but now I don't think I will. She wouldn't want me there, anyway. How is your work going? Have you learned anything new?"

“Not much. Feliks Król spent some time in a mental institution.”

“Oh.”

“But a doctor who knew him said he was probably misdiagnosed. A lot of people with autism were considered either cognitively impaired or psychotic back then. I’ve been talking with someone who knew Feliks pretty well. He’s convinced Feliks didn’t prey on kids, thinks he probably just found the clothes when he was out scavenging. And the art—he’s sure that’s unrelated to Danny.”

“What do you think?”

“Honestly? I’m starting to lean that way, myself.”

“What do the police say?”

“I haven’t talked to them in a while.”

“The woman called me a few days ago. Shirley? Didn’t have any news, just said she wanted to keep in touch, like you used to do.”

“Good.”

“It’s not the same. I keep feeling she’s holding something back. Any idea what it could be?”

Anni remembered the rumors Slovo had picked up about Brian’s fortunes, a money laundering investigation, her own long-ago probe into his complicated finances. “They don’t talk to me. That’s just how the police operate when they’re working on a case.”

“You did.”

“I never had anything to tell you. I still don’t.”

“At least you tried. Did you read that article Az Abkerian

wrote? Your journalist friend? I forget where it was published, some online magazine. I thought it was rather good. Brian hated it.” Was that a chuckle?

Anni searched for the article and read it, then called Az. “Nice job on your piece in *The Grapevine*.”

“Thanks. I’m still waiting for the check. I could buy a sandwich with it if they ever get around to paying me.”

“You made Ben Sidlo look ridiculous.”

“I’m not taking credit for that. He did it all by himself, though it seems to have gone right past him. He texted me to say how great it was.”

“I hear Brian Truscott was pissed off.”

“Because it wasn’t all about him? Guy talked my ear off and didn’t even notice when I stopped taking notes. I was lucky to escape.”

“Have you heard any rumors about him lately?”

“Like what?”

“I heard something about money laundering.”

“Who’ve you been talking to?” He sounded more amused than surprised.

“It was third hand, something on the internet. Just curious if you knew anything about it.”

“Haven’t been able to confirm anything, but word on the street is he’s under federal investigation. Thanks to some friends in high places he got a big plot of land on the near South Side where the projects came down. He’s supposedly putting in a mixed-use, mixed-income development, the

crown jewel of the Plan for Transformation, quote unquote. The source of the private funding he came up with is one of those riddles wrapped inside an enigma registered in the state of Delaware.”

“That’s interesting. Back when Danny went missing, I went down a rabbit hole, looking at his finances. He seemed pretty sketchy, but the higher-ups told me there was nothing there.”

“You think there might have been?”

“I don’t know. I’m just not convinced Feliks Król had anything to do with it.”

“ . . . ‘anything to do with it,’” he muttered to himself. She pictured him, scribbling away, his phone trapped between his chin and his shoulder.

“That’s not for attribution,” she added.

“Jesus Christ. What is it with you? Still . . . this is good. Pitching a financial crimes story is tough. Tie in a missing kid, that could sell it.”

Anni wondered what she’d unleashed. If it turned out Brian Truscott’s dodgy business practices were somehow responsible for his son’s disappearance, it could envelop the family in a media firestorm. On the other hand, a journalist recognized for his crime reporting might be able to get a lot further in uncovering a financial motive than she ever could. That thought reminded her of the reason she contacted Az in the first place. “Say, you doing anything on the Pete Foster case?”

“Why? You got something for me?”

“It’s probably nothing, but Devon Oachs, who hosted the party where the murder happened and Matthew . . . hang on.” She had to dig in her bag for her notebook, flip pages. “Matthew Bradford, who was also there that night, they have an LLC that just invested a pile of cash in a business that Kyle Peterson is trying to get off the ground, some tech startup. Peterson got introduced to them by Josh McLaren.”

“Your nutcase.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call him that. Anyway, Kyle Peterson was also at the party, trying to make friends, and when I talked to him yesterday—the same day the LLC wrote a big check—he was really squirrely. Didn’t want to talk, seemed super stressed. I contacted other people who were there when Pete Foster got stabbed, but nobody’s talking. I have some names.” She read them out, along with their phone numbers. “These guys all went to the same high school on the North Shore as Josh and had a reputation for being pretty wild. Kyle Peterson is the outsider. He doesn’t come from money. He got Josh to introduce him to these guys, hoping to hustle some venture capital for his startup. Which apparently worked, though today he didn’t seem too thrilled about it.”

“What’s the name of this business?” She gave him MiMi’s URL and read out the name of the LLC. “Okay, got it. You have any theories about this?”

“I’m sure you can come up with your own.”

“You’re such a hardass. Can you give me something on your client, Josh McLaren? What’s he going through?”

“No comment.”

He sighed gustily. "Fine. Be that way. I gotta go."

Someone had left a voicemail while she was talking to Az. Donna, her voice buoyant with excitement. She'd been able to look at the phone records. Kyle had called Josh at 3:03 am Sunday night. Was that an important clue?

Anni pulled out her wallet, then burrow through her bag, finally finding the card tucked into one of its many pockets. Detective Elijah Morton. She punched in the cell number he'd written on the back.

"What?" He sounded harassed.

"Hi, it's Anni Koskinen. You got a minute?"

"I can give you fifteen seconds. What's on your mind?"

"Have you talked to Kyle Peterson lately?" He didn't answer. "I tried to this morning. Something's bothering him."

"Watching a guy bleed out will do that."

"Well, yeah, but here's another thing: he'd been trying to get people to invest in his tech startup. That's why he wanted to hang out with Devon Oachs and his pals, to coax them to put some money into his venture. A couple of them did—just today. Weird timing, huh? Another thing, turns out Kyle called Josh a little after three am. Like, to invite him over right around the time Pete Foster got killed, so he could take the fall."

"We already have the phone records. We have a timeline. Look, I realize you're trying to be helpful, but we've investigated a homicide or two, we know what we're doing."

"Okay, but the money—"

"Got it, thanks. I'm going into a meeting." She heard

voices in the background, his voice at a distance booming out a friendly greeting to someone else before it cut off. Either it wasn't news to him, or it was news he didn't want to hear.

She looked up the address for the Moonbeam Theatre, checked out the traffic situation, and headed to her car.

“Did my mom send you?” Cassie Truscott glowered at Anni. She sat behind a sewing machine in the crowded back room of a trendy shop on Milwaukee. Rags Restored, a bohemian boutique where wealthy twenty-somethings bought second-hand clothes for big bucks after they were cleaned up, mended, and labeled “vintage.”

“She wouldn’t even give me your phone number.”

“So what are you doing here?”

“I’m researching Feliks Król, the man who had your brother’s clothing in his room.”

“The famous artist.” She flavored the word with sarcasm.

“Right. Anyway, I heard you designed costumes for the Moonbeam, so I asked around and . . . here you are.”

Cassie concentrated on ripping out a seam. “I remember you. You were the one who came to the house back then. Asking all the questions.”

“I know that must have been hard.”

“You don’t know shit.”

She watched Cassie work, holding up the dress, then bending over it, pinning things together, snipping at something with tiny scissors. “That day in the park—”

“You’re not seriously going to do all this again? I told you everything I knew, which was nothing. He was there, and then he wasn’t. That’s it. What else am I supposed to say? You want me to make something up? He was abducted by aliens. How’s that work for you?”

“No, I don’t want anything but the truth.”

Cassie fed the cloth into the sewing machine, frowning in concentration as she guided the stitches. She tossed the garment on a pile, then sorted through a box of clothes, pulling out a skirt, ignoring Anni as she examined its broken zipper.

“It’s just, you were only seven, and naturally you were upset, so maybe—”

“You know what really upsets me? Is when people tell me I’m upset. Fuck, I need a cigarette.” She dropped the skirt and reached into a purse hung on the back of her chair. “This is a smoke-free building,” she announced to herself, in a prissy voice.

Anni followed her out the back door into an alley. Cassie gave her an irritated look, then lit up and leaned against the brick wall, shrugging her cardigan around her. It was chilly as the sun began to dip behind the buildings.

“I used to smoke,” Anni said, feeling a pang as the scent drifted past her.

“Tough shit. I’m not sharing.”

"That's okay. I quit, anyway."

"Aren't you special?" She drew on the cigarette, tilted her head back, and let the smoke stream out, staring up at it as it curled and broke up. There wasn't anything left of the sullen seven-year-old who'd taken her brother to get an ice cream, stringy blond hair, sunburned cheeks streaked with tears and snot. Her cheeks were rounder, now, and she filled out her dress with generous curves, her hair dyed deep purple with pink streaks, an elaborate black-and-gray tattoo winding around her neck. Nothing was left of the child she had been, except the sullenness.

"I found your brother's clothes in Feliks Król's room a few weeks ago." Cassie shot a suspicious look at her. "It was planned that way. The art historian who hired me to do some background research found them and thought it would make a good story: Woman who failed to solve the Danny Truscott disappearance finds new evidence in the room of a mad artist. Something like that."

"Terrific," she muttered.

"I was pissed off, but I needed the money, so."

Cassie drew hard on her cigarette, flicked ash.

"Anyway, I've been talking to your mom, and it occurred to me maybe you had some thoughts about what happened to Danny."

Cassie pulled her cardigan closer and stared down the alley. Anni waited. "Yeah, I've had some thoughts," she finally said. "But you know what? I don't want to drive myself crazy, so I try not to."

“I can see that. I’m sorry this got raked up again. But maybe if the cops can finally find out what happened—”

“So my father can go on TV? So people can get all excited listening to the gory details? Maybe there will be a true-crime podcast. Wouldn’t that would be cool.”

Anni leaned against the wall and looked up at a skein of low-lying clouds, gray against the brightness of a mound of cumulus, lit up by the setting sun. It would be dark, soon, but for now the high clouds were bright white, towering and majestic, like baroque castles floating overhead, serene and clean, a different world above the dirty, cluttered city. She flashed on Feliks Król’s pictures, so often full of weather. Light streaming through clouds like a benediction, a gathering storm looming over children, cloudbanks ominously animated with flickering lightning. “Your father’s an asshole, but I like your mom. I know you might not get along right now, but she’s a good person.” Cassie didn’t respond. “I think she’s lonely.”

The tip of the cigarette glowed as Cassie drew on it.

“Well,” Anni finally said, pushing herself off the wall. “I should leave you alone.”

“You know who you should leave alone?” Cassie said, dropping the spent butt on the pavement, grinding it out with the toe of her boot. “Danny. He was just a little kid, and he’s gone, and there’s no way to bring him back, but everyone wants to have a piece of him now. You, the press, that guy who wants to make a creepy artist famous. My fucking

father. Stop exploiting him." She turned to go inside, slamming the door shut behind her.

As she walked to her car, something started to twitch against her leg. Her phone, she realized, vibrating in her bag. She reached for it, didn't recognize the number. "Hello?" Not really paying attention, prepared to hang up on a journalist.

"It's me."

Dugan's voice. Something clutched tight in her chest. "What's up?"

"You have a house guest. He needs to know somebody's going to be showing up to serve him papers."

"How did—"

"They're getting the paperwork together right now, talking to a judge. If your friend wants to get out in front of this, he needs to leave, now."

"What's going on?"

"I don't know, but I figure if you're letting him stay at your place, you must have a reason. Don't loan him your car. They'll be looking for it, so I'm borrowing my aunt's, a 2006 dark blue Accord. I'll park it in your alley somewhere. Is there space in the back?"

"I'll leave my spot open."

"Good. The keys . . . let me think. You still have that stack of pots by the back gate? I'll drop them in there."

"Are you going to get in trouble over this?"

"Are you? Your house guest has some federal agencies

interested in his whereabouts. They're throwing their weight around. They could make your life miserable."

"How did they find out where he is?"

"Not sure, but my guess is some of my fellow officers decided to stake out your place to see if they could catch me violating my supervisor's orders, then saw this other thing going down. I'd better get moving. Tell your house guest what's up. And you, don't talk to anyone without a lawyer."

"They'll guess you tipped me off. You shouldn't be involved in this, there has to be another way. I'll take him to the bus station."

"They'll be watching for him."

"Then . . . I don't know. I'll figure something else out. I really don't want you to screw up your career, Dugan."

He laughed. "I'm feeling pretty good about my career right now. Better than I have in ages. Tell your house guest: dark blue Honda, keys in that pot. It'll be parked behind your house in twenty minutes or so."

"Thanks. And thanks to your aunt. Does she even know about this?"

"She knows. I'm using her phone right now. Anni? Love you." And he was gone.

She dropped her phone back into her bag and started to jog to her car.

"Hey, I found something interesting," Slovo said as she opened the door.

"You need to pack up. They found you. Soon as a judge signs off, they'll be here to pick you up."

"Shit." He was sitting in front of Adam's computer, the glowing screen the only light in the room. He turned back to the keyboard and started pecking. "Need to check something."

"I picked up some cash in case you're short. A friend is bringing a car you can use to get out of town."

"Dammit," he muttered. "Nothing. Maybe by tomorrow—"

"You don't have time." Anni found his duffle, dropped it on the couch. "It's a Honda Accord. Leave it somewhere safe and let me know so I can go pick it up."

"Okay, okay." He gathered up some papers scattered around the computer. "Ow, shit, I've been sitting too long." He stretched and groaned. "So, that last batch of notebooks you gave me? One of them is about Danny. The thing is—"

"I'll take a look later. I think I have some energy bars upstairs, something you can eat on the road. You'll want to get as far as you can from Chicago by morning."

"Relax, would you? Worst that happens, they take me into custody." He was aggravatingly calm, while her pulse was jumping. "I can stonewall them for a while. How'd you hear they were coming, anyway?"

"I still have a friend in the CPD. He's arranging the car."

"Oh." He pointed to the ceiling. "The toothbrush?" He gave her a Groucho Marx leer, eyebrows dancing up and down.

"He's putting his job on the line. For Christ's sake, get a move on."

"All right, all right. This other thing I found, you'll want to check it out. I think it might tie into the notebook." He handed her a sheet of paper. "Genealogists are amazing detectives. Put out a question, they're all over it. I love the god-damn Internet."

"What is this?" She tilted the page to pick up the light from the computer screen, but still couldn't make it out.

"Names of Joyce Trustcott's downstate cousins. The one I circled, she's the one to talk to, but she's kind of a recluse. You probably won't get anything out of her unless you go in person and catch her by surprise. She lives south of Carbondale, deep in the woods, off the grid at the old family homestead."

"Thanks. We need to get you out of here. The car will be out back in ten minutes."

He limped around, picking up strewn clothing, fetching his gear from the bathroom. "You're sure in a hurry to get rid of me."

She was smoldering, biting back angry words. *I took you in. I bought that damned pizza for you. We're loaning you a car . . .* Her angry internal monologue was interrupted as she watched him straighten after bending to zip up his duffle, his face twisting in pain. "Wait, can you even drive?"

"It's like riding a bicycle, right? No license, but that's the least of my worries."

"I mean your leg."

"Just stiff." He poked around the room, lifting things, shuf-

fling papers beside the computer, putting the rat in his cage and filling his bottle with fresh water. "Don't forget to feed him. He'll eat pretty much anything, except anchovies. We have our standards."

She jogged upstairs to grab some granola bars and fill a water bottle. From her balcony she saw the Honda was parked by the back gate. She trotted downstairs and tucked the food and water into his duffle. "Car's here."

Slovo shrugged on his coat, slung the duffle over his shoulder, and made his way across the room to retrieve his cane. "Listen, before you do anything else, take a look at Danny's story. That notebook opens up a whole new way of looking at the case. Then head downstate to find that cousin, but don't tell anyone what you're doing, not until you've checked it out."

"Fine. I'll get right on it."

"In fact . . . I just had a great idea."

"No time for that. You need to hit the road."

"How about we hit it together? You up for a road trip?"

“This is nuts.”

“Hmm?” Slovo stirred, yawned. “Yowch. Fucking hip. Did you get any sleep?”

“No. You were snoring too loud. Besides, I’m nervous.”

“Sure. This case was a big deal for you, and this might crack it open, or it might be a total bust.”

“It’s not that. We’re about to show up unannounced to question a woman who lives like a hermit in the middle of the woods in a part of the state where people run strangers off with shotguns.”

“That’s a stereotype.”

“We’re, like, ten miles from Kentucky. It’s another world down here.”

“They probably think Chicago’s crazy dangerous.” He peered into the woods, still tangled and dark. “You think there’s bears around here?”

“Probably.”

They had made it to the southern end of the state by 3:00 am. They'd stopped at an all-night gas station on the outskirts of the tiny town where Joyce Truscott had grown up. Slovo chatted up the old man working at the counter while Anni prowled the aisles, picking up snacks and pretending to read the ingredients. She paid for a candy bar and two coffees and headed back out to the car as Slovo lingered, listening to a long-winded joke. He was still good at cultivating informants.

The man had given him enough information that, after a few false turns, they were able to find a mailbox by the side of a gravel road that had reflective letters stuck to it, spelling out Truitt. Etta Mae Truitt, one of the Pope County Truitts, still living in her granddaddy's house. She made quilts and kept bees. Didn't see much of her, he'd told Slovo, except for when she brought her honey down to sell. Those Truitts, they kept to themselves. Anni had parked on the side of the road near the mailbox, then they'd settled in to wait for dawn. Slovo snoozed while Anni watched the overgrown drive that disappeared up into the forest darkness. The stars that twinkled through the tree branches overhead gradually faded as the sky began to lighten until the stars were gone and the sky was a deep, crisp blue.

"Ready?" he said to her.

She sighed, started the car, and turned up the driveway. They bumped along, tree branches clawing at the sides of the car, winding up the hill until they broke into a clearing. A weathered house with a deep porch and smoke coming from

the chimney sat on the crown of the hill under a gnarled oak tree. Beside it, a barn, once red but now mostly a rose-tinted gray. A dog loped out of the doors that were propped open, barking. He stopped beside the car, head lowered, growling and showing his fangs until a sharp whistle snapped his head around. He barked once more for good measure, then trotted back to the barn, where a woman stood, cradling a shotgun.

"I told you," Anni muttered, then got out of the car, careful to hold her hands out at her sides to show she wasn't a threat. Slovo followed, hobbling around the car to join her. "Ms. Truitt?" she called out.

"Who's asking?"

"My name's Anni Koskinen. We just drove down from Chicago. I wonder if I could ask you a few questions."

The woman didn't move for a few moments, then she gave her head a little regretful shake. Anni caught her breath as the shotgun came up out of the crook of her arm, but she was only setting it down, propping it against the wall. "Been wondering when you'd show up."

She turned back into the barn and they followed. Had to finish with the chores, she told them. Chickens clucked in a pen, picking at feed, a basket of eggs set down on a straw bale nearby. The woman took a steel bucket into the cow's pen, pulled a stool over, leaned her head into its flank, muttering wordless calming sounds, and began to squirt milk as the cow chewed cud and looked around at them with big, placid eyes. The dog had sprawled on the earthen floor after giving

them a good sniff and an extra growl just to be sure. He was motionless except for the eyebrows that shifted up and down as he looked from Anni to Slovo.

They were watching the boy who was staring at a shaft of sunlight beaming through a gap in the barn siding, filled with dancing motes of dust. He seemed transfixed by the swirling patterns of gold flecks, though his hands were busy, plucking at the hem of his shirt, then rising to his chin to clutch together before falling down, fingers fluttering along his chest, wrists twisting before starting all over again.

“He does that,” the woman said, carrying the milk bucket out of the cow’s stall. “No harm in it. Come on inside and we’ll have some breakfast.” She picked the shotgun up in her other hand and started trudging toward the house. “Bring the eggs,” she called to the boy. He turned awkwardly and went, pigeon-toed, to the basket set beside the chicken coop, taking the handle in both hands, carrying it carefully. The twitchy spasms seeming to migrate to his elbows, jerking out at his sides like wings trying to lift his skinny, angular body up into the air.

She led them into the kitchen, where she set the milk down and took the basket of eggs from the boy. “Go turn the cow out into the pasture and I’ll get the food on.” He nodded. It was an elaborate motion, circling and tipping his head back, letting out a faint squawk of a laugh as he flapped his hands at his sides, then a definitive yes, his chin dipping to his chest. She smiled as he left, then turned and pointed them to the table. “Sit. There’s coffee on, you want some?” She didn’t

wait for answers, got two chipped mugs out of the cupboard and filled them. Set them down on the red-checked oilcloth and sat across from them, exhaling in a sigh. She was a big woman, muscular but growing softer around the edges with age, her graying hair scraped back into a messy ponytail. "You don't look like cops."

"We're not," Anni said. "I was a long time ago, but not anymore. I know Joyce, though."

"How's she doing?"

"Okay, I guess, except her daughter doesn't want anything to do with her and her marriage is bad."

"She'd leave that son of a bitch if she had any sense. She gave you directions?"

"No. She doesn't even know we're here."

"It was Andy," Slovo said. "At the gas station."

"Damn, I'm going to have to straighten him out. Who are you, anyway?"

"Name's Slovo. We used to work together." He jabbed a thumb at Anni. "I'm just along for the ride."

"What'd you do to your leg?"

"Got shot. On top of that, I went and broke it. I've always been clumsy."

She started to laugh, a throaty rumble that turned into a cough. When the fit was finished she wiped her eyes and turned serious, even grim. "So, you going to tell the police?" she asked him.

"Nope," he said. "Matter of fact, they're looking for me, so

I'm staying out of their way. Not sure what she wants to do, though."

"I don't understand any of this," Anni said.

"Time for questions later." The woman pushed herself up from the table. "Danny's back. That boy's got a hollow leg. I got to get to cooking."

They finished their scrambled eggs and were nursing cups of coffee at the table as Danny settled on a couch in the next room with a book open in his lap, rocking as he flipped the pages, his hands rising up and fluttering beside his head as he pored over the illustrations, occasionally making little grunts and squeaks. "He still likes his dinosaurs," the woman murmured. "Every time they get a new dinosaur book at the library, they set it aside for him. But astronomy's the new thing. He drug me out the other night to teach me the constellations. He fetched a blanket we could sit on and a flashlight so he could show me what they're called in his book. Like to have froze out there."

She glanced at them frowned, offended by things they hadn't said. "He reads good. He picked it up fast, all by himself. One thing about Danny, he ain't stupid. I homeschooled all of my kids, and he's as sharp as any of them. There's not a thing wrong with his brain. Nothing wrong with him at all, but other people and their narrow minds." She swallowed some coffee, then put her mug down, started to move it in little circles. "How'd you figure it out?"

"I don't know how much you know about what's been going on," Anni said.

"Read about it in the paper. They think some crazy old hoarder kidnapped and killed him."

"Right. Danny's sandals and a shirt that he'd been wearing when he disappeared were in his room. There was a lot of strange art in there, notebooks filled with illustrated stories about children in trouble. Turns out one of those notebooks was about Danny. In his version, he wasn't kidnapped. He was escaping."

"He got that part right, anyway."

"Slovo found out Joyce had relatives down here. I knew she had cousins, but I didn't think she was close to any of them."

"She wasn't. Her daddy made sure of that. He had ambitions, didn't want to anything to do with his redneck relatives."

"Anyway, the cops thought she was stonewalling them, so they asked me to talk to her. She told me she was certain Danny was dead. When I talked to Cassie, the daughter, she told me to back off. Slovo, here, he was convinced the crazy hoarder was innocent. I was coming around to that position, but I had no idea where to go from there."

"I had some time on my hands," Slovo picked up the story, "so I got online, traced the family relationships through a genealogy site, and got in touch with one of your cousins. Well, second cousin once removed. Taylor Truitt, lives in Edwardsville? She spends a lot of time on Facebook."

"That sounds like Taylor, all right."

"She was happy to have a chat with a genealogy buff about the Truitt family. In the course of it, she mentioned you were caring for a thirteen year old. Said his disabilities came from his mother being a drug addict."

"Disabilities," Etta Mae snorted. "She should talk, she can't even do long division. So, where that came from? I had a niece, Laurie. She moved to Saint Louis, got in with a bad crowd, died of an overdose. When Danny came to live with me, I said he was hers and people accepted it. Not the first time I've cared for children here. Something goes wrong in the family, this is where you come home to. Her whole side of the family has troubles. They didn't want him."

"We knew about Joyce's older son, Philip," Anni said. "That he had been through all kinds of programs and therapies because his father was determined to cure him. Which made Slovo wonder if his little brother was in for the same treatment."

"That was the thing. Joyce was seeing signs. Their doctor wasn't sure, but she could tell. She was terrified he'd have to go through all that, like Philip did. She knew Brian, she knew how stubborn he was. Even if she asked for a divorce, he'd make sure he had control of Danny's medical treatment, and she saw what it did to Philip. Made his life hell. Ended up sent away to live in some school for handicapped kids."

"It got worse. He's in a nursing home, now."

"See? Goddamn. She loved those boys. Must have broke her heart to give Danny up, but she knew it was for the best. And this was the only way she could think to do it."

“How’d you pull it off?” Anni was torn between admiration and frustration. “If I’d seen your number in her phone records, you’d have got a visit. I’d have figured this out ten years ago.”

“Good thing I don’t have a phone, then, smartypants. More coffee?”

She rose, fetched the battered pot from the stove, and refilled their mugs. “Forgot to ask if you take milk. I got some pasteurized in the fridge. We used to drink it raw, but my Uncle Bennett got real sick, almost died of it, and the extension man said it was the milk. Gave us a pamphlet showing how to do it. It’s not that hard, and a good thing because I’d never keep up with all the milk that boy drinks. If I didn’t have my own supply, I’d be running to the grocery every other day.”

She got a jug of chilled milk from the refrigerator and thumped it on the table, then busied herself clearing their plates. “Most everything we eat comes from this farm, just like when I was a girl, only I don’t keep pigs or sheep anymore. My brother’s boy brings me meat from his place. All organic, grass fed and whatnot. There’s a growing market for it. He’s doing real good. Everything we eat here is real food, none of those chemicals in it. It’s a lot healthier.” She sat again, cleared her throat with a rumble. “I got us off the subject.”

“How many people were in on it?”

“Just us. Me and Joyce. Kind of thing, no matter how much

you trust folks, you don't want people knowing. I mean, even the FBI was working on it."

"I still don't . . . I mean, how'd you do it?"

"Well, I hadn't heard from Joyce in years when . . . no, let me back up to the beginning. I told you her father had his nose in the air. He moved to town, married a banker's daughter, lived in a big house, drove a fancy car. You didn't see him here, except for every August when he'd drive up this hill and drop off little Joyce while they flew off somewhere on vacation. She was an only child, a shy little thing. Barely talked the first time, just watched everyone with big eyes until she finally loosened up and started swinging on the rope in the barn, or catching frogs with us over by the pond. There are always a lot of kids here in the summer. Each August, she'd get dropped off here all wrapped up tight in herself and she'd kind of unfurl over the next two weeks, like a morning glory does, until her parents came to fetch her."

She smiled to herself. "We were the same age, and we both liked to read. We'd hole up in the hayloft with a big stack of romance books and talk about things. We were good pals. But when she was twelve, that stopped. They took to sending her to summer camp instead. Probably thought we were a bad influence. We went to the same high school, but by then she was in with a different group of kids, and then she went off to college to find somebody rich to marry. Get her MRS, that's what they used to say. And she did, too. Didn't have time for us, anymore."

"But that changed," Anni said.

“No so much. I only met her twice after that. First time, she turned up here one evening, late, two kids in the back seat, at her wits’ end. Cassie was just a couple months old. Philip would have been, what, four? She said the baby wouldn’t stop crying and Philip kept hitting his head on the wall and she didn’t know what to do. She only stayed a week. Seemed to do her good, having family to help out, and we had some good talks, like when we were girls. But she was kind of embarrassed about the state she’d been in and wanted to get home before her husband got back from a work trip. She didn’t want him to know, he’d think she was an unfit mother. After that I’d use the payphone at the grocery to call and see how she was doing every now and then, and she appreciated it.

“Then one day I called and she told me about Danny, how scared she was. Oh, she was a wreck, and all I could say is ‘what can I do? Tell me what I can do!’ She didn’t know. I felt like going right up there to give that husband of hers a piece of my mind, but that wouldn’t have worked. She married a man like her father, a loudmouthed bully. She’d probably crumple up and take his side, that’s what I figured.

“I called again a week later and she told me she had a big favor to ask. A really big favor. Could I come up to Chicago and meet her? ‘Well, that’s not such a big favor,’ I said, kind of joking, and she told me that wasn’t it. It was a whole lot bigger. So I drove up and we met in a park and she introduced me to Danny and told me her plan.”

“You’re the one who took him in Grant Park that day?”

“That was weeks later. I drove up, stayed at a Motel 6 overnight, then drove downtown and went to the park, like she told me to. As if I wasn’t already nervous enough, driving in the city, I’d never done that before. Oh, there was such a crowd, I was afraid I’d never find them, but then I caught sight of them. Joyce was looking bad, like she might pass out. In fact, for a minute I thought she did, sitting down on a stone ledge with her head in her hands. Cassie was pestering her and Danny was jumping up and down, overstimulated by it all. Plus she must have been stressed, knowing what we were about to do. The original plan was for me to meet them as they were leaving. She was going to get Cassie distracted while I took her brother, but I saw my chance when Cassie led Danny over to an ice cream stand. While she was busy trying to get the ice cream man’s attention, Danny took off, slipping between people, probably looking for a place to get some peace and quiet.

I whistled to get his attention and he let me pick him up. I thought he remembered me, but I’m not sure, it could have been the shirt I had on. It had a big rhinestone flower on it, and he kept trying to pull the rhinestones off. I carried him off to my car, stuck him in a booster seat I had from when my kids were little, and gave him a box of animal crackers to keep him occupied. That was Joyce’s idea. He liked animal crackers and she figured it would be something familiar. Then I headed out. Couldn’t believe how expensive the parking bill was, but I wasn’t about to argue.”

“So, how did those clothes end up in Feliks Król’s room?”

“Well, that was the thing. I was planning to get on the highway, but I got confused and missed my turn, and then I heard on the radio they were looking for him. Gave his description and all, and I realized I couldn’t drive around with those clothes on him. I pulled into an alley in a quiet neighborhood and got him out of the car. It wasn’t too hard to get the shirt off him, but those sandals. Oh, he did not want to part with those sandals. And let me tell you, nobody could throw a tantrum like Danny. I was about to lose my mind when this old man came up. Had a beard like Santa Claus, only kind of dirty, with a sack over his shoulder.”

“Feliks,” Anni heard Slovo murmur.

“I thought he was homeless and was going to ask for money, but he took this thing out of his bag and showed it to Danny. A Rubik’s cube. It’s still in Danny’s bedroom, though he doesn’t play with it anymore, it’s too easy. The man twisted it, showing how you could match up the colors, and Danny’s eyes got big and he stopped yelling and kicking. He picked himself up and went over and put a finger on the cube. I want that. He didn’t have to say the words, they understood each other. The old man pointed at the sandals, and Danny took them off. They made a trade. I left the shirt there, got Danny back in the car and we went home.”

“You realize I spent a year of my life trying to figure out what happened?” Anni said. “It was that easy?”

“Easy! We got lucky. If Joyce hadn’t been so desperate I would never have gone along with something so crazy. That first week, I could hardly sleep, waiting for police to come

knocking. I was sure somebody would have seen us. But I looked like a mother, and Danny was perfectly happy to go with me, at least until I tried to take those precious shoes of his. Then he turned into a little demon. If that man hadn't come by, I don't know what would have happened."

"He's the one, you know," Anni said. "The crazy old hoarder."

"I figured it might be. He sure saved my life that day. Our lives. So . . . what are you going to do?"

Anni didn't know how to answer. She looked into her coffee cup, trying to read something in the grounds at the bottom of it.

"The old man's dead," Etta Mae said. "it can't hurt him if they think he did it. And Danny's fine, here. Look at him, you can see. He's thriving." She pointed. The boy had set his book aside and had slipped off the couch to stand in the sunlight coming in through a window. He was chuckling to himself, bobbing a little and twisting his wrists, fingers flicking as he watched his own shadow, finger puppets acting out some secret show all his own. Etta Mae touched Anni's arm to get her attention. She leaned forward on her elbows, her hands clasped. "It's what Joyce wants for him. I call her every year on her birthday and tell her how he's doing. She knows he's happy. It's not just me, either. If I got sick or died, my daughter will care for him. He'll always have someone, he's family. Don't take him away." Her words turned into a whisper, almost in tears. "Please don't."

"Of course I won't," Anni said, feeling a burden lift.

Etta Mae persuaded them to have a rest before they left. Anni took one of the spare beds. The woman told her proudly Danny had helped make the quilt on it. He liked making patterns and the feel of the cloth. Her head was whirling with thoughts as she lay down, but she passed out almost instantly. She woke two hours later when Slovo nudged her arm. "You got a message.

"What?"

"On your phone. I can't read it. Don't know your pass-code."

She took it from him groggily, sat up and punched in the code. "'The package has arrived safely,'" she read aloud. "It's that Signal app. Must be the Boston lawyer, the one who vouched for you. I wonder what . . ." She looked up and realized Slovo was pumping his fists, making little grunts of pleasure, like an adult-scale Danny. "Yesss," he finally said. It sounded like steam escaping. "Whoo. *Goddamn*, that's good news."

"Are you going to explain?"

"It's the thing in Boston, it's over. She's going to be okay."

"She?"

"I'll tell you in the car. Come on, let's go home."

“Irina Kozak,” he said after they’d said goodbye and made it down the rutted, winding drive and turned onto the gravel road. “I met her about three years ago. She was buying cigarettes at a convenience store and was having trouble with the cashier, who was trying to rip her off. I straightened him out and we fell into conversation. She didn’t know any English, so she was happy to have someone who understood her. But she didn’t tell me what was going on for the longest time. Too scared.”

“What was going on?”

“She’d been trafficked. Not what people usually think, it wasn’t sex work. She cleaned office buildings and hotel rooms. In exchange for working twelve-hour days, seven days a week, they agreed not to kill her.”

“Who’s ‘they’?”

“The Demchak brothers. Real charmers. Their organization brought her over on a tourist visa, with the understand-

ing they'd get her a work permit and a job at a hotel. She's from a dinky little town. No jobs, no future there, so it seemed like a good deal. Once she got here, they took her passport and told her how it was going to work. They had organized all the paperwork, paid for the bribes and the airfare, gave her a place to live. She had a debt to pay off. Pretty soon, she realized there was a whole bunch of women like her paying off debt, and none of them ever got free and clear."

"Those crooked cops you told me about, were they involved?"

"That . . . well, I may have misled you a little."

"It was a lie."

"No, course not. Well, parts of it. What happened is, I had been helping my BPD friend out with a thing involving a prostitution ring. Some guys were bringing in kids from the boondocks to work on the streets, and a couple of cops were involved, taking a cut. That part was true. It didn't involve the deputy superintendent, though, or a strike force. I exaggerated a little."

"That's what they call a lie."

"I wasn't sure I could trust you at that point. I needed to stay out of the picture long enough to make sure she was safe. Lying to a federal officer can get you five years in the slammer, and I wasn't about to tell them where she was."

"This Irina person."

"Right. She's from Ukraine. They have a network there, the Demchaks. They recruit women from the countryside, people who are desperate, and feed them into the outfit over

here. It's big. They operate in eight cities, servicing office buildings, hotels, and industrial laundries up and down the east coast, and nobody asks questions about the workers' status because it's all handled through a tangle of subcontracts. You get the labor you need and none of the responsibility for hiring people without documents. All of these women are caught between our government, which would deport them in an instant for overstaying their visa, and the Demchaks, who not only beat the crap out of them to keep them in line but promise to have them killed back home if they get deported. Which has happened. At least six women who tried to get away were scooped up by ICE. Irina knew two of them personally. The gang had photos of what happened to them back in Ukraine. They'd make sure all their workers saw those pictures so they'd know not to turn to the authorities."

"But Irina did?"

"Not at first. Too risky, so I tried to get the goods on the Demchaks myself, but that didn't go too well. They took me on as an errand boy, but before I could get enough evidence for a prosecution they figured out what I was doing and tried to take me out. So, that door was closed. By that time I'd taken the whole mess to my friend in the BPD, and it was going up the chain. A prosecutor decided this could be a good case for his career. He wanted witnesses. Irina agreed to help, which would have worked out fine if the feds hadn't tried to take it over. They got into a pissing match with the

prosecutor, and all Irina wanted was to take care of her little boy.”

“How did this kid come into it?”

“Right, it complicated things. When she got pregnant, she kept it quiet. They didn’t know until she was well along. Had the baby by herself in one of the apartments where they kept them when they weren’t working. A couple of the older women knew what to do. The bosses tried to take the baby away, but Irina’s fierce. When she gets this look in her eye . . . “

He turned to gaze out the passenger side window for a minute, as if the cows they were passing were fascinating. Then he coughed and pinched his nose. “Anyway, she just bundled him up and took him to work and nobody messed with her. They had already pulled her off hotels, too many opportunities for her to interact with people and get ideas. She was cleaning empty office buildings overnight, and when that shift was done they’d take her to a laundry they controlled. She kept Max with her the whole time. Maksim. Cute little guy.”

“That arrangement wasn’t going to work forever.”

“No. He was getting too big. She was afraid they were going to take him from her and . . . god knows what. It was only a matter of time, so she needed a way out. I took her to meet with the police and a prosecutor, but then FBI agents and CBP and an asshole from Homeland Security got into it. They wanted to use her to nail the Demchaks, and kept putting the screws on her in different ways. She wasn’t coop-

erative enough. Not the right kind of victim. It would have been more compelling if it was sex trafficking, instead of her coming here for honest work, that shit's illegal. Besides, she'd slept around and had a baby, that showed poor character. Like that. When they pushed her, she pushed right back, and they didn't like it. The feds hinted she could get a T visa, but the prosecutor wouldn't certify her."

"What's a T visa?"

"It's temporary status for people who have been trafficked. You can stay for up to four years, but only if a local law enforcement agency says you're cooperating in an investigation, which means if they don't like your attitude, you're screwed. That's one thing Irina has plenty of, attitude. When the prosecutor decided to be a hardass and threatened to take Max she decided she wasn't going to let them be separated. So I helped her out."

"Helped, how?"

"I found some people who found other people who could smuggle her across the border to Canada so she could apply for refugee status. The lawyer who sent that message to you, she lined up supporters there, including a politician who knows about Irina's situation and likes to poke the US government in the eye. 'Arrived safely' meant Irina presented herself at an immigration office and they think she has a credible asylum claim. It'll take a long time to work through the process, and it's not a guarantee. People have been pouring over the border, given the situation for immigrants here. But

at least for now she's with her son and they won't be separated. That's all she wanted."

"What's going to happen to you?"

"Not sure. Best case scenario, I get to help make a case against these traffickers. If the feds and that prosecutor really want to bust these guys, there are ways to do it without her testimony. Worst case, they'll find something to charge me with and I'll go to prison." He shrugged. "Or the Demchaks try again and manage to bump me off this time." He seemed to find that amusing.

"Those are all crappy options. Don't you worry that—"

"Weren't we supposed to turn back there?"

"Shit. I think you're right." She looked for a place to turn around.

"Or take the scenic route. I have plenty of time."

"I don't get it. Why are you in such a good mood?"

"You solved your case. Irina and Max are safe. It's a good day."

She found a wide spot in the gravel road and circled back to the intersection, made the turn, made a few more turns and got onto the interstate. "I wish there was a way to make sure nobody else finds Danny," she said once the highway was humming under them. But he had fallen asleep.

She chased the problem in circles as she drove, but didn't get anywhere.

"You mind dropping me off in Bronzeville?" he asked as they approached the city, traffic growing clotted with rush

hour, the spiky profile of the Loop jutting into low clouds. "Might as well go straight to headquarters, get this over with."

"You sure?" He nodded. "All right. Let me know what happens."

"If I can, I will."

"I couldn't have found Danny without your help. I owe you."

"If you want to pay me back, set the record straight. Tell the world who Felix really was: a man who helped kids in trouble, not a monster."

"I don't know. I mean, sure, he wasn't a monster but if the police think he was, if they concluded he killed Danny, they'd stop looking and Danny would be safe." She thought about that notebook, the one in which Feliks Król told Danny's story in his weird, mythic way. She should delete it from the server, try to get her hands on the original . . .

"That's true." He frowned in thought. "You're going to keep working for this art historian guy?"

"For now."

"So, in the course of your research, you find evidence pointing to someone else. Lay down a false trail."

"You have ideas?"

"Let me think on it."

She thought about it, too. It would have to be something good enough to fool Shirley McGrath and her partner, something that would hold up to media scrutiny. Planting physical

evidence would be tricky. Something circumstantial, but solid enough . . . it wasn't going to be easy.

The towers of the Loop rose in front of them, veiled in mist off the lake. Slovo smiled and shook his head ruefully. "Man, I missed this place."

"Do you think you'll come back when this business in Boston is wrapped up?"

"Nah. Too many memories. Too many ghosts."

"Plus you have family here and you don't get along with them."

"It's not . . . I mean . . ." He scratched his scalp and sighed. "It's not their fault we grew up like we did. I should probably call Steve one of these days."

"When he's actually home?" He shot a look at her. "He told me you only call when nobody's around to answer. He seems like a good guy."

"He is. We just don't have much in common except sharing a crummy childhood. For a long time, I was mad at him for not fixing it, for joining the army and leaving me behind, but that's stupid, he was just a kid himself. He couldn't do anything. And our mother . . . I can't say I'll ever understand whatever was going on with her, but I was kind of the same way. I mean, I had a temper. A really bad temper."

"A bust-up-the-office-furniture temper."

He laughed. "You remember that?"

"Heard about it. It was legendary."

"Yeah, well. Weirdest thing, it mostly went away. Almost like during all those surgeries I had on my leg, that anger got

removed. So maybe I could talk to Steve now without losing it. You close to your brother?"

"Yeah. Real close, though our childhood wasn't great. I had a temper, too. Acted out at school a lot. I was mad at my mom for a long time, for the way we grew up, for abandoning us, for all those foster homes. I got over it when I realized why she probably did what she did. I mean, I don't know anything about her, but I met enough people in situations like hers to realize it probably was the best she could do for us." She made the exit onto LaSalle. "So, what, you'll stay in Beantown, then?"

He shrugged. "Probably. They need translators, I'll have work, and I like the place well enough. Though for a while I actually had the crazy idea I might try to emigrate. Join Irina and Max once they got settled, but she nixed that plan."

She made the turn onto Michigan and drew up to the curb across from police headquarters.

"You and Irina. You were . . . in a relationship?"

"It's that what you call it?" he said. "I love her, that's all."

Anni thought back. What had he said, he'd met someone, and it changed him? This sounded serious. "Is Max your son?" she blurted out.

"I thought so for a while. I wanted him to be. She says he isn't." He smiled wryly. "And don't ask her about it. She'll tell you it's nobody's business, and the way she says it? You won't ask twice. She's independent," he added. "And tough as nails. It's just her and Max against the world. They'll be all right."

"Maybe you can visit, anyway."

“I don’t think so. I didn’t say she loved me.”

“He gave me this big goofy grin,” she told Dugan later. “Like no big deal, but it was an act, you could tell. I almost lost it, driving home. My nose got all stopped up and I didn’t have anything to blow it on. Do you know how much that tickles?”

“Distracted driving. You can get ticketed for that.”

“A guy who grew up on the streets because his home life was so shitty finally finds a family to belong to, even risks going to prison to help this woman and her kid, but she makes it clear she doesn’t want him in her life. I suppose she has her reasons. She’s been through a lot, but it sucks for him.”

Anni told Dugan about it the day she found him sitting in her back garden, three weeks after Slovo had turned himself in. Dugan was comfortably sprawled in one of the two folding chairs he’d carried down from her porch. He’d placed a crate nearby with a dish towel spread across it, topped with a mason jar holding a bunch of tightly-folded tulips.

When she saw him, her heart started suddenly pounding, either from fear or something else. “What are you doing out here?”

“It’s too nice out to be indoors. That back fence needs something.” He showed her the gardening site he’d been browsing on his phone. “What do you think about trumpet vine?”

She dropped into the chair beside his. “I mean *here*, here. My place. Your case is wrapped up?”

He produced a champagne bottle from a bag beside him. “No more job-related separation. That calls for a celebration.”

She went inside to fetch plates and glasses as he emptied a Pete’s grocery bag, spreading out a picnic of fragrant Italian salami and paper-thin prosciutto, olives, cheeses, crackers, and fruit. As she nibbled an olive, he worked the champagne cork out with his thumbs until it made a satisfying pop and filled their glasses. She took his hand and looked over the yard where crocuses were blooming along with clusters of tiny blue flowers with a name she’d forgotten, sun dappling her lap through tree branches. She lifted her glass to it in a toast. “Thanks for this.”

“It’s just the cheap stuff. I could have sprung for something pricier, but honestly, I can’t tell the difference.”

“I meant for the garden. Remember what it used to look like? I never thought it could look this good. God, I missed you.”

“So did the garden. The weeds are taking over.”

“Yeah, well I didn’t want to pull out flowers by mistake. I can’t tell the difference.”

He squeezed her hand, then reached for his plate and filled it with food. “Catch me up. You had another guy staying here while I was away.” He gave her a fake leer.

“Hey, nothing happened. He just—”

“Kidding. But seriously, what was the deal with Slovo?”

“You probably know more than I do. Haven’t heard a thing since I dropped him off at headquarters.”

“And CPD turned him over to the feds. That’s all I know. What was he doing here? Why was Homeland Security all over him?”

“Long story.”

“I’ve got time.”

“A Ukrainian woman he knew was a witness in a trafficking investigation in Boston. It started local, but then the feds got involved. She apparently had a bit of an attitude, wasn’t sufficiently submissive or something. Or maybe it was just interagency politics, I’m not sure. Anyway, things escalated to where deportation was a possibility, and there was a good chance she would be killed if she was sent back. So he set her up with a smuggler so she could try for asylum in Canada. Until she actually got there and made her claim, he didn’t want to be questioned about her whereabouts, so he made himself scarce.”

“Canada? We have an agreement with them. Won’t they just repatriate her?”

“A politician has taken up her case. It’s getting a lot of pub-

licity, given how we've been treating asylum seekers who come here looking for safety. It's a point of national pride that a country so much smaller than ours now takes in more than we do. Looks like the prime minister is going to intervene on her behalf. Major international incident, coming soon to CNN."

"How did Slovo get mixed up in all this? Is he back in law enforcement?"

"No, he works as a translator now." She told him what she knew and what Slovo had said as she dropped him off. "It was sad, you know?"

"And on top of that, he's facing serious legal trouble," Dugan said. "Conspiring to transport an illegal alien can get you twenty years. If they want to screw him over, they have all they need."

"He has a good lawyer." Anni had exchanged some encrypted messages with Anita Brockhurst. Slovo was cooperating fully and his testimony and insider knowledge was key to convicting the Demchak brothers. On the other hand, the attorney expressed concern that the administration might turn it into a show trial; anti-immigrant sentiment was easily fired up, and Slovo's checkered past would give them ammunition for a public character assassination. Brockhurst was spoiling for the fight, though, and seemed almost eager for a public battle she felt confident they would win.

"What was he doing in Chicago, anyway?"

"Ah, that's . . . I told you he knew Feliks Król, didn't I? He

was totally convinced Feliks didn't hurt Danny Truscott, so he tracked me down to argue the point."

"He came all the way from Boston for that?"

"I know. A little extreme, but he had to hide out for a while, and once he was here, he met Adam, who needed a house sitter, so."

"He didn't make a pass at you for old time's sake?"

She punched his arm. "If he had, there would be a body buried out here under one of your flowerbeds."

"Ow." He rubbed his arm for show. "Do you buy what he said about Król?"

She hesitated. She wanted to tell him everything, but as a sworn officer he would feel duty bound to report Danny's whereabouts. Or, out of loyalty to her, he might keep her confidence, but he would feel bad about it. There would always be a barrier, those things they couldn't share. It was all mixed up with her own feelings about the job, about how estranged she had become from a community she'd so wanted to be part of, a community that had shut her out.

"We can talk openly," he said, being a mind reader as usual. "I quit my job."

"What?"

He held up a palm. "That came out wrong. I meant to tell you I got a new job. Officially turned in my star today, hence the celebration." He topped off their glasses and raised his in a toast. She was too stunned to follow his lead.

"It's fine," he added. "Great, actually. Haven't felt so good in ages."

"But your career. It's your life."

"I'll still be investigating homicides, only I'll be doing it for the Cook County Public Defender's office."

She gaped at him.

He pointed to her glass. "Are you going to wait until all the bubbles are gone before you drink that?"

She downed her champagne in a few gulps and refilled it. "Wow. That's a change. What does your family think?"

"They'll come around."

"Dugan, jeez." *They'll blame me*, she thought. And why not? She blamed herself. "You shouldn't . . . I mean, we could have . . ."

"Whoa, you got the wrong end of the stick. It's not you, it's the job. I started to lose the faith years ago. That's why I left headquarters. I thought maybe on the streets I could do real work, work that helped people. But I was being delusional. It's the whole system, it's messed up top to bottom. Hell, you know what I'm talking about. After Laquan I knew I couldn't keep lying to myself."

Laquan McDonald, a kid shot by a cop for walking away, for being Black and not subservient enough. It was covered up, but made national headlines when the video surfaced that proved the official story about lunging with a knife was a lie. It might have shocked the conscience, but it wasn't a surprise to anyone on the inside. The city budgeted millions of dollars every year for payouts to victims of police misconduct. It was just the way things worked, the way they'd always been.

It was the same attitude that had forced Anni out after she crossed the blue line in a courtroom.

"I thought if I got out of the halls of power and back onto the streets . . . but, nope. It was even more obvious out there. At some point you're just propping up something you can't fix. So, time for a change. The upside is I'll be able to bitch to you about my cases, now. Aren't you lucky."

She shook her head. "Leaving will be hard, Dugan. I've been there, I know. Worse for you, though. Working for the public defender? That's like going over to the enemy. Your whole family is in law enforcement. You guys are close, but—"

"They'll come around," he said firmly. It almost sounded as if he meant it.

He topped off his glass and filled his plate. "Enough of that. I want to hear about your cases. Josh McLaren, for one. Sounds as if your client maybe isn't a cold-blooded killer in spite of his frequent confessions to mass murder."

"Have you heard something?"

"Just that it's not the slam-dunk it seemed, and the brass are trying to figure out how to spin it. They weren't too happy with Elijah Morton, complicating a high-profile case. Not exactly thrilled with your guy's mother, either. She's determined."

"No shit."

"She gives you credit. Or blame, depending on your point of view. So, tell me how you managed to ruin the commissioner's day."

She told him about the suspicious investment into Kyle Peterson's startup, about tracking down Josh on an island in Jackson Park, barefoot and distraught. Remembering his feral look made her think of Feliks Król's strange paintings of threatened children, of the way Danny Truscott, stared, fascinated, at specks of dust floating in the sunlight. She finished explaining how she found the suspicious business investment that led her to suspect Josh had been set up.

"Nice. What about that other thing, the work you're doing on that artist?"

She hesitated, then realized they didn't need to keep secrets anymore. She could trust Dugan, she would always trust him, so she told him.

"After all these years," Dugan murmured. "You found him at last."

"It was Slovo's idea. I should have figured this out years ago."

"And returned Danny to his father to mess up his life? Good thing you didn't."

"True. Still, I need to find a way to close this case. Shirley McGrath is too good. She won't let it go, and Danny could still have his life messed up. There has to be a way to throw her off."

"Maybe it's time I spill the beans about my recent case," Dugan said. "That touchy one that they thought I couldn't be trusted to keep my mouth shut about."

"Was it to do with Slovo's situation?"

"What? No. Caught people totally by surprise when he

showed up to turn himself in. Nah, it was about Danny's dad and his involvement in a messy scandal that involves city officials and some creative financial types with mob ties. Brian Truscott is in this shit up to his neck."

"I'd heard rumors."

"Yeah, it's been leaking out. He could go to prison. Or he'll flip and become a cooperating witness, but he won't be doing those big real estate deals anymore. He'll lose his shirt. Those talk shows will drop him. It won't happen fast, though. An investigation this complex can drag on for years before anyone's even indicted."

"Meanwhile, Shirley could figure it out, and Danny could end up with his dad while Joyce is charged with kidnapping, along with her cousin downstate. I need to figure something out."

"*We* need to," he corrected. "But not tonight. Tonight we celebrate."

Resolving the Danny Truscott case took all three of them, and four months to make it happen. Dugan frequently had to interview prisoners in connection with cases taken up by the public defender's office. He scouted possibilities until he found a few candidates who could be plausible witnesses given the right incentives.

Anni sent the potential names Dugan gave her to Slovo, who was spending a lot of time being grilled by officials from three-letter agencies. In time, a couple of Dugan's names matched Slovo's voluminous inventory of past informants.

They settled on a man who remembered Slovo well and was willing to play along in exchange for Slovo topping up his commissary account on a regular basis for the duration of his sentence. Slovo, in turn, vouched for him as an honorable criminal who didn't necessarily respect legal boundaries but could be trusted to keep a deal. For her part, Anni did the leg-work to make sure the jailhouse confession the inmate would report to authorities would hold up when Shirley McGrath and her partner checked it out.

Every now and then her conscience pinched her hard for setting up a dead man, albeit one who had been convicted of killing another child, for a crime he didn't commit, but then she pictured Danny watching dust motes dance in the sun. It might not be by the book, but it was a kind of justice. She waited anxiously for Shirley McGrath and her partner to wrap up their investigation.

It was late fall when Anni got the word. After a thorough investigation, authorities were satisfied the confession of a dead man, passed on by another inmate, was genuine. She immediately called Joyce, who now lived in a condo in the city. She had hired a lawyer and secured a decent divorce settlement before the rumors that were circulating put Brian Truscott's wealth at risk.

"I just heard from the police," Anni told her. "About Danny. They'll be coming to tell you what happened to him."

She heard Joyce suck in her breath.

"They're certain he was murdered not long after the

abduction. An incarcerated man told a fellow prisoner he kidnapped and murdered your son. I'm sorry, I know it must be tough to hear."

She waited for Joyce to respond. "But how . . . I don't understand."

"Shirley called to tell me. They're going to have a press conference later, but all the details checked out. They're confident they can close the case."

"This man, he confessed?"

"The inmate he confided in didn't tell anyone until long after the man was dead, but they investigated and concluded the guy had told the truth. He was downtown around that time, he was a known offender, and he was serving time for a similar crime. He'd taken and killed another little boy, like Danny, only that time he got caught. Unfortunately, they don't expect to find Danny's remains. The man didn't say where he was buried. I'm sorry about that, but they're convinced they know who was responsible. It's over."

"I don't know what to say."

"I just got off the phone with Detective McGrath. She's on her way to tell you in person, but I thought I should give you a heads up. Give you time to collect your thoughts. I hope this will give you some peace at last."

"Yes," she said faintly. Then again, more firmly, "Yes, it will. Thank you for all you've done."

Anni never learned if Etta Mae had told her cousin that she and Slovo had found Danny. There was a flurry of publicity, but she didn't speak with Joyce again. She worried at first that

Shirley McGrath had her doubts that a long-dead offender had killed Danny and disposed of the body in a hidden grave. There was something alert and knowing in the way she studied Anni's reaction when she told her about the promising lead from the prison in Joliet. It was a fleeting impression, a jolt of uncertainty, but by the time the investigation concluded, Shirley seemed content to close out the file and move on.

Az Abkerian was a concern, though. He contacted Anni about the mad artist who had been suspected and then vindicated of murder for an in-depth story that he had pitched successfully to *The New Yorker*. It was his first big break since leaving the *Trib*. She'd nervously agreed to meet him to talk over Danny's case.

She approached the meeting with a mix of caution and dread, though found herself enjoying his company as he recounted the stories he'd written and the times their paths had crossed over cases. After three beers, Az was into reminiscing, and he didn't have the deadline pressure of news reporting that usually cut their conversations short. He made several follow up calls, digging into Danny's story, confirming facts, always probing for more. He had coaxed out of the CPD and the Illinois Department of Corrections all the details on the man they concluded was guilty, but she worried Az would interview the convict who pinned it on him and unravel the story or, worse yet, look up the downstate relatives for backstory and discover what really happened.

When the article appeared, she skimmed it anxiously and called him. "You bastard."

"Hello to you, too."

"We had an understanding."

"Don't blame me. The first draft I submitted left you out completely, just like you wanted. Wasn't what the editor wanted, though. He insisted."

"I don't care what the editor wanted."

"Good for you. I don't have that luxury. I need my career back."

"You said our conversations were off the record. What about protecting your sources?"

"From what? You come off looking good. Besides, everything in there was confirmed by multiple sources."

"It's not the story you told me you were writing. How'd I end up being the center of everything?"

"It kind of evolved, okay? My first attempt was too dry, too much straight news. They want nuance, complexity, a meaningful narrative frame. At least, that's what they said. Honestly? I had no idea what I was doing, but the editor kind of fell for you as the heart of the story, and after half a million drafts it turned out okay. More than okay. It may even be the best thing I ever wrote."

"You had to bring my family into it?"

"Human interest. Plus, thematically it fit too well to leave out. A guy who grew up orphaned and misunderstood, shunned by society, but made amazing art that everybody misinterpreted. A detective who grew up in foster homes and

got kicked out of the force for telling the truth, someone who regularly looks out for mentally ill people who go missing. Look, this is my shot at reviving my career, Koskinen. I need the string to get to the nationals, and it's working. I'm already getting calls."

"Me too, you jerk. That's the last time I help you with a story." She ended the call, wishing she still had a landline so she could slam a receiver down. Then she blocked his number.

The other reporters were harder to avoid. She couldn't afford to miss messages from clients or call-backs for the jobs she was doing for Thea Adelman. She took calls from unfamiliar numbers just long enough to learn if it was a reporter, a true crime podcaster wanting to set up an interview, or a legitimate work-related call.

One afternoon she took a call from an unfamiliar number, prepared to cut it short.

"Hi. Um, do you have a minute? I'd like to talk to you about . . . this is a little hard to explain."

The voice wasn't ingratiating and organized like a reporter, and Anni was used to hearing hesitation from clients. "No worries. Go ahead."

"This will sound weird, but . . . I'm pretty sure I knew your mother."

Anni said nothing for a moment. She became aware of the hum of her refrigerator, the sound of a car alarm honking rhythmically some distance away. She took the phone in her

other hand and wiped her palm on her jeans. "How'd you get my number?"

"I'm not trying to get anything from you. I got a grant to do some research at the Newberry, so when I knew I was going to be in Chicago, I thought I should make contact. See if you might want to meet."

"My number. How—"

"Oh, right. It was that article. 'Missing Persons.' Your name jumped right out at me. So I contacted the author and he gave me your phone number. He also said you might hang up on me."

She felt like it. Ending the call, blocking the number. Putting it down to some crank. But instead she asked, almost without intending to, "What makes you think you knew my mother?"

"The dates match up. Her story. And the name, it's not all that common outside Finland. I'm pretty sure it's her, but I have some photos. You'll be able to tell."

"I doubt it. I was only two years old when she abandoned us. I barely remember her."

"Oh." There was a moment of silence before the woman added. "You should have the photos, anyway, and the letters she wrote to me. In case it's her." She waited for a response, but Anni didn't speak. "I'm sorry. This must be a shock. Would you like me to call back later?"

"No." She closed her laptop, stood up and wandered to the window, looking out without seeing the street below, flicking through the few memories she had: an Indian-print skirt

with a spicy smell. A warm lap. A necklace she played with, holding the blue glass beads up in the sun to catch the light. “Where do you want to meet?”

“I’m staying downtown. There’s a café nearby on the corner of State and what it is? Chestnut, I think. I was there last night, it didn’t seem too busy. Or we could meet somewhere else. I don’t know the city well, but I can take a cab.”

“The café is fine. I can be there by six-thirty. What’s your name?”

She heard the woman take a breath and let it out before she answered. “It’s Anni. Anni Koskinen.”

The café was dimly lit, most of its tables empty. Anni saw her immediately. A slim woman in her fifties with hair so blond it looked white, skin as pale as skimmed milk, and a tentative smile as she made a half-hearted wave, the kind when you’re not sure if you’re greeting the right person. Anni went to her table. “You’re Anni Koskinen?”

“And so are you.” Her smile flickered on, then off.

Anni took the seat across from her. “Apparently not. I mean, it’s a fake name.”

“No. She gave it to you. It’s yours now.” A server was angling toward them, carafe in hand.

“Just coffee for me,” Anni told her, not really wanting anything, and waited for her to leave. “So, this woman . . .”

“Her name was Lisa Schmidt. We grew up together in Eveleth, Minnesota. It’s up north, in the iron range. Home of

the world's largest hockey stick and a lot of Finns, including my family. Koskinen is Finnish."

"I know."

"Your mother—"

"This Lisa Schmidt person."

She registered Anni's skepticism with a nod. "Right. She was my best friend, growing up. We went to kindergarten together, were in the same class until ninth grade. Let me show you . . ." She twisted around to reach into her bag, took out an envelope. Opened it and sorted through snapshots, emotions washing over her face before she bundled them together, tapped them straight, and handed them to Anni. "She was so young. Only fifteen when she left."

Anni sifted through them. Two little girls on a dock in swim suits, one blond and one brunette, grins showing matching gapped teeth. A posed school picture of the brunette in a turtleneck, her brown hair long and straight, her smile secretive. Some group photos of kids in a playground, at school, hanging out. A candid snapshot of the brunette as an almost-adult, dark pines behind her, her face warmly lit and glowing, her hair catching the light, a smile brimming with joy.

"We were at a bonfire that night," the other Anni Koskinen said. "A friend had them at his farm almost every weekend. They were fun."

It was the same face, a little younger, a lot softer, as in the photo Anni had hanging on her wall beside the kitchen table. The photo she'd managed to hang onto through all the foster

homes, the one Dugan had restored and framed for her after it got crumpled and stained.

“We’d smoke weed and drink beer and Kevin Makonnen would brag about almost blowing up the chemistry lab again. Whatever drama was happening in our lives, we’d leave it behind. Any thoughts about enlisting in the military or applying for college or getting a job at the mine, it didn’t come up, whatever was coming next. It felt like we’d be hanging out together in those woods forever.”

Anni set the stack of photos aside when the server brought her coffee.

“I didn’t realize how bad things were for Lisa,” the woman went on. “I mean, I knew, but . . . not really. Her people lived in a trailer park on the edge of town. They had the wrong kind of friends, and the police were out there a lot. Her father went to prison when we were nine, and before long another man moved in. She hated him. Later I wondered if he had been abusing her, but at the time I didn’t know what to think, other than that she was growing up faster than me, having boyfriends, cutting class, getting drunk. And then she was gone.”

She peered into the manila envelope again and drew out a bundle of papers tied with a ribbon. She untied it and sorted through them. “Here. This is the note she left me.”

Anni unfolded the piece of lined notebook paper, stained sepia with age along the folds. “Andy’s giving me a ride to the cities!! I’ll send you a postcard! You’re my bestest best friend forever. XoXo Lisa. PS: I’ll pay you back soon as I can.” The

handwriting was round, hearts instead of dots over the letter i, the signature exuberant and underscored with a flourish of looping lines, ending in a butterfly. A happy, hopeful moment captured in fading ball point ink.

“I’ll pay you back?” Anni read aloud.

“I’d brought money to school that day for a band trip. Two hundred and fifty dollars saved up from working at the drugstore. She took it, plus my driver’s license. I’d only had it for a week. I had been bragging about getting mine when her birthday was still two months away. When I read that note, I was so mad. It wasn’t just the money, it was because she was going to have a real life and I was left behind. It wasn’t until I got older that I figured it out why she probably had to leave home. The signs were all there. I just didn’t know what I was seeing. When I read that *New Yorker* article and found out what happened to her . . . dammit.” She flicked the corners of her eyes with a finger. “Sorry. It’s just that we were such good friends.”

Anni picked up the picture from the bonfire. “So her name was Lisa, huh?”

It was close to ten when Dugan texted to see if it was okay to come over. He arrived at her flat half an hour later, looking worn and discouraged, his tie hanging loose. “Hard day?” she asked.

“Yeah. Pretty crummy.”

“There’s wine.” She pointed with her glass to the bottle by

the sink. He picked the bottle up and frowned at the low level. "And plenty of beer in the fridge," she added.

He got one out, wrenched off the top as if strangling someone and slugged half of it down. He stared at nothing thoughtfully for a moment, then held a fist to his chest and belched. "Spent all day talking to a defendant's neighbors, his family. Witnesses. No sign so far of anything mitigating." He drank the rest of his beer, tossed it in the recycling bin, and got out a second. "This one's bad." He closed his eyes and rubbed them with a finger and thumb.

"I'm guessing your guy's not innocent."

"Not even close. This is when I should have a speech in my back pocket about justice for all and making sure the system works. But honestly? His own mother wants him locked up. Thought we might have a couple things to work with, but none of it panned out. What's all this?" He had wandered to the couch where the photos were scattered around her. He looked at her, suddenly aware. "Hey."

She gathered up the photos and handed him the fireside snapshot as he sat beside her. "This is my mom," she said.

He studied it, taking his time. Then he took the other photos, handling them with the same care. "How did you get these?"

"A woman who knew her when they were kids read Az's article. She's a college teacher, in town for some research she's doing. She gave me these, and some letters. Nothing but good news in them, friends she'd made, some cool place she was staying. Nothing about tricking or drugs. A lot about

Martin learning to walk, having a tantrum at the corner grocery, dancing with her at some concert. There's one about me being born. It's weird. She seemed totally happy about having another kid even though, you know. It wasn't like having another baby was going to make things easier."

He brushed her hair back and gently ran his thumb across her cheek, his fingers cold. "And I thought my day was tough."

"It's good. I mean, knowing more. Having a name. I just wish things hadn't been so hard for her, you know?"

"I know," he mumbled into her hair. She leaned into him, smelling that Indian-print skirt, feeling that faint memory of a warm lap. "Have you talked to your brother about this yet?"

"I'll wait until he comes here for breakfast Sunday. It's part of our routine, that's probably the best time. I don't know how he'll feel about it. I mean, he was older. He remembers her." She ran a finger along the edge of the photo. "At least I'll have some stories to tell him about her."

Later, he ordered some food and she told him what she now knew about Lisa Schultz, a kid growing poor up in a trailer park in a mining town where kids hung out in the woods together, thinking it would never end.

The next morning Anni was still in bed, half asleep, drinking a mug of coffee that Dugan had brewed, when her phone rang. "Shit," she muttered, recognizing the number. Then she took a breath and answered. "Hi, Donna." Dugan, who was dressing for work, rolled his eyes in sympathy.

"You need to check on Josh," Donna said brusquely. "He just told me he killed someone."

"What, again?"

"How can you joke about it?"

"Sorry."

"He has an illness. He's not a murderer."

"I know." She'd been sent to check on Josh just last week, and the week before that. He was doing fine, happy to tell her about some incomprehensible math problem he was working on without any tightly-wound anxiety that showed itself when reality was warping around him. He was still troubled by fragmented memories of that night and the stressful aftermath, but no more than anyone would be. His mother remained on constant alert, though. "How bad did he sound?" Anni swallowed the rest of her coffee, then rose and rummaged in her closet for a clean pair of jeans and a T shirt.

"I don't know. Not that bad. Actually, he told me he was kidding, but why would he make a joke about a thing like that? I mean, after all we've been through. Did I tell you that boy, the dentist's son – what was his name?"

"Kyle."

"Did I tell you he had the nerve to send me a letter of apology?"

"Yup." More than once.

"As if I'd ever forgive him for lying to the police, for going along with a plan to pin the murder on Josh just to get money for some stupid business venture. If I hadn't given the police

those phone records, I hate to think what would have happened.”

“The cops had their suspicions about the setup from the start. They would have figured it out.”

Only a week earlier, while making a records request for Thea Adelman at police headquarters, she’d run into Elijah Morton. He gave her a good-natured ribbing about the *New Yorker* article and filled her in on the investigation. It had only taken a couple of weeks to break down Kyle and Devon Oachs’ friends, a few more to get an indictment. Oachs was out on bond awaiting trial scheduled for the following year. The detective wasn’t looking forward to the media circus or the experience of being cross-examined by expensive attorney and had his fingers crossed a plea deal would let him off the hook.

Donna made a scoffing noise. “Are you serious? You didn’t see how they treated poor Josh. They assumed he was guilty. Anyway, I need you to check on him for me. In person.”

“Sure.”

“He’s spending the day in the math library, at least that’s what he said. He didn’t sound too bad this time. I mean, he actually called me. It’s my birthday tomorrow. He remembered and he called. That’s something, isn’t it?”

“It’s a good sign.”

“You’ll check, though, and let me know?”

“I’ll head down there right now.”

Dugan filled their travel mugs as she dressed and packed up her computer. After checking in with Josh, she would

spend some time at the university library, reading up on the history of orphanages and mental institutions. Though Ben Sidlo seemed disappointed to find his disturbing artist wasn't a notorious killer after all, she was still coaxing what she could out of archives and people's fading memories, looking for those nuggets that might explain Król's vision of the world while paying for a new roof. Sometimes she read through the notebooks, seeing something different in them now. Something that turned harrowing truths into mythic stories of innocence and experience.

She parted with Dugan on the sidewalk. "Good luck with your case."

"I'll do what I can for this guy, even if he's the kind of bonehead I used to feel good about arresting." He glanced at his phone and barked a laugh. "My brother just texted me, giving me a hard time. Can't wait till Sunday dinner when the whole family piles on. My place tonight?"

"Sounds good." Their kiss lingered a little longer than usual. His family was, as he predicted, starting to come around, tested but finding ways to make room for their black sheep at their table. She watched him walk toward his Jeep, a phone already pressed to his ear, watched him juggle the phone and coffee mug as he got out his keys.

He glanced up and saluted with the mug, a little coffee splashing out of it. She returned the salute, then climbed into her car and went to work.

Afterword

Ideas for fiction come from strange places. Twenty years ago I stumbled across the art of Henry Darger, a Chicago writer and artist who labored in secrecy, developing entire imaginary worlds that were only discovered after his death. His art was compelling—and disturbing. What prompted him to invent stories about children who suffered horrible fates at the hands of brutal adults? Why did so many of his drawings feature naked children of ambiguous gender? What drove him to pen tens of thousands of pages about a slave rebellion in the “realms of the unreal”?

I looked up what books I could find at the time. One (I can’t remember which) fabricated a psychological portrait of the artist and hinted at the possibility his obsession with child murder indicated he, himself, was a killer. As disturbing as I found Darger’s work, I found that suggestion an aggravating stretch, one based on the too-common conflation of mental illness with violent behavior that so often inspires crime fiction.

Years later, the feelings Darger’s art stirred in me two

decades ago became the germ of a plot idea. I wanted to explore the idea of creative work pursued so privately, outside the pressures that artists feel in our era of the attention economy. At the same time, I wanted to probe the ways we attribute sinister motives to people who live outside the boundaries of social expectations. And I was interested in revisiting characters from books I published years ago—without getting caught up in the publishing world. I’ve done that (not especially successfully) and I didn’t enjoy it.

A few years ago when I decided to step away from the world of commercial publishing, I explained that decision in a 2016 blog post in these words:

You have to be really good and really lucky to make it in traditional publishing. I read a lot of books and I’m grateful to the authors and publishers who feed my reading addiction, but I haven’t been good and lucky enough to break out, except in hives. Turns out I’m severely allergic to the business end of publishing. Why try to do something that makes you miserable?

“Indie” publishing isn’t the solution for me. You have to be really good and really lucky *and* willing to produce like crazy to make it in self-publishing. I can’t write that way. My muse is like a toddler taken for a walk. Forget about getting anywhere fast. Besides, I think our fetish for productivity is irreparably harming ourselves and the planet. So that’s out for me.

Combine my slacker tendencies and an allergy to the business of publishing with serious reservations about Amazon, the leading platform for self-published books, it makes sense for me to try something that fits my personal values better. More

like the zine world—hand-made and imperfect and shared for love, not money. To be honest, most fiction writers are motivated more by love than money because hardly any make a living at it. But even so, productivity, sales, and frantic marketing efforts infuse the writing world and that's what I want to leave behind. It's inconsistent with my anarchist tendencies and my own mental health.

If you're reading this, thanks for spending time in my imaginary world. If my story gives another person an hour or two of entertainment, that's reward enough. Thanks, too, to my partner who has always been my first reader and chief motivator, and to Minitex for funding the Minnesota Library Publishing Program's instance of PressBooks that I used to produce this book.